

PJRREPORTS

Published by the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility

WHAT'S INSIDE

Gloria Arroyo, Traveling

Everything the Philippine head of state does abroad is fair game for the media



A Chilling Comparison

The ghost of the political past has risen in the present

After 20 Years, A Recess for the JVOAEJ

A recess, not an end



A DEATH LIKE NO OTHER

■ By Hector Bryant L. Macale

THE PHILIPPINE press mirrored the nation's collective grief over the passing of former President Corazon "Cory" Aquino last Aug. 1. For at least a week, the death, wake and funeral of Aquino—who fought colon cancer for 16 months—overshadowed other stories such as Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's recent US trip. Aquino's death was like no other in recent history, reminding everyone not only of her role in the overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, but also of the need to resist all forms of tyranny.

Because of its significance as well as the context in which Aquino's death occurred, the flood of men, women and children that filled the Manila Cathedral and the streets of the capital to catch a final glimpse of her sent not only a message of grief and gratitude. It also declared that Filipinos had not forgotten Cory Aquino's singular role in removing a dictatorship, and implied that they resent the efforts by the Arroyo regime to amend the 1987 Constitution, thus validating the results of the numerous surveys that not

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Photos by LITO OCAMPO

editor's NOTE

PJRREPORTS

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Blaming the media

MALACANANG WAS on the offensive last week, as the details of the million-peso dinners (there were several) Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and her retinue consumed before and after her Aug. 1 audience of 30 minutes with US President Barack Obama unfolded. Among the objects of Palace ire were the media in the Philippines and the United States.

The *New York Post* came in for some harsh words from Arroyo spokesman Anthony Golez, who derided the *Post* as “a tabloid pretending to be a broadsheet.” The *Post* has never made such a claim, and it would be absurd for it to do so, there being no reason for it. Since it was a column in the *Post* which was the source of the information that Mrs. Arroyo and company had dined at the high-end New York restaurant Le Cirque at a cost of US\$20,000, it made perverse sense for Golez to try to put it down. But a publication’s being a tabloid—and its being a Rupert Murdoch publication, as the *Post* is—does not automatically make its reports or commentaries unreliable, just as a publication’s being a broadsheet doesn’t make everything in it accurate, fair, relevant, etc.

The attack on the *Post* was an echo of an outburst by Mrs. Arroyo’s lawyer, Romulo Macalintal, against the Philippine media. Macalintal had earlier declared the Philippine media unworthy of accusing anyone of immoral behavior, of which some columnists and editorial writers have accused Mrs. Arroyo and company. After all, he said, the media were accepting for publication and airing thinly disguised political ads

from 2010 aspirants, which makes the media immoral.

Macalintal did not launch into any criticism of the principals—the candidates come 2010 who have been evading the legal restrictions against political campaigning prior to the official campaign period, which for 2010 starts in February.

Again, however, it makes perverse sense to attack the media instead.

Doing so makes it appear that the scandals that have hounded the Arroyo regime—as all other reports of wrongdoing—are all the media’s fault, and makes Mrs. Arroyo and company victims rather than victimizers.

This is neither new nor original. The regime has been fairly consistent as far as the media are concerned. The media were apparently major targets of the regime plan to declare martial rule in 2005, as well as its declaration of a national emergency in early 2006, in the belief that without the media, no information unfavorable to it would ever come to light.

This is a distinctly authoritarian argument which could and has led to restrictions on the media. It was at the core of the media censorship and government regulation that Ferdinand Marcos imposed upon the declaration of martial law in 1972, and would no doubt would have been the justification for media restrictions if the current regime’s plans to declare martial law had materialized. ■

LUIS V. TEODORO

PRESSED FREEDOM

Manix Abrera



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



frontPAGE

The death of former President Corazon Aquino once more brought thousands of Filipinos to the streets

speaking of MEDIA

Media and the right to vote

"(We are) set to explore the possibility of allowing journalists and media practitioners to vote in absentia or ahead of elections. The deprivation of the right to vote of the considerable number of journalists in the country during elections has become a serious cause of our concern."

—Election commissioner Lucenito Tagle on extending absentee voting to media practitioners, Philippine Daily Inquirer, July 20

Media and Imelda

"Her biggest and toughest battle, however, has always been in the media where the cruelest caricature and clichés about her persist. Negative press opinion terrifies state prosecutors, judges and justices from confessing openly that sufficient evidence does not exist against her in any of her cases, and that, however terrible or unacceptable it may appear, the law seems to favor her side."

—Francisco Tatad on media's treatment and portrayal of Imelda Marcos, Philippine Daily Inquirer, July 4

State of Media

"Philippine media have been under siege since Gloria Macapagal Arroyo came to power. The hostile environment her watch has created, unprecedented since the Marcos period, has undermined the constitutionally protected freedom of expression in general and press freedom in particular."

"The killing of journalists persists. More than half of the journalists killed during the post-Marcos period were killed during the Macapagal-Arroyo administration. Only in three cases—the murder of Edgar Damarlario, Marlene Esperat and Armando Pace—have the killers been convicted. However, no mastermind has been prosecuted."

"A slew of libel cases, of which those filed by First Gentleman Mike Arroyo are the most obvious evidence of regime hostility to criticism, transparency and press freedom, have been filed against critical journalists. Media groups and at least one journalist, Carlos Conde, have been tagged as enemies of the state either by the military's infamous 'Knowing the Enemy' presentation or its 2007 Order of Battle in Davao."

"The imposition of a state of national emergency in 2006 highlighted the hostility of the administration towards the free press as media organizations were put under surveillance and threatened with sedition charges. The mass arrests of journalists during the Manila Peninsula siege in November 2007 also show not just the government's ignorance of the workings of the press but also its contempt for press freedom."

"Macapagal-Arroyo and other officials profess their commitment to press freedom, but their statements have proven to be nothing but lip service. The list of cases of media repression since 2001 is endless. The imprisonment of Davao broadcaster Alex Adonis as a result of a libel case filed against him by the Speaker of the House of Representatives shows how government officials can use the law to silence and intimidate those who are critical of the powers-that-be. Broadcast journalist Cheche Lazaro was sued for wiretapping by a government official as a result of her work in exposing corruption. Journalists who went to Maguindanao were briefly detained when they covered the conflict there. All are the result of an atmosphere the Arroyo administration has created which encourages media repression...."

"Under these circumstances, the media have fought back to uphold and protect press freedom and free expression. There now exists a de facto alliance among media organizations and other cause-oriented groups as the former fight the administration's hostility towards the press. The Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists (FFFJ) was established precisely in response to the unabated killings. Various media groups have issued position papers against onerous bills like the right of reply and to campaign for access to information and the decriminalization of libel. The UP Film Institute played a major role in the re-establishment of the Task Force Free the Artists (TFFTA) to fight censorship."

"Aware of the current administration's hostility towards press freedom, the College reaffirms its commitment to help media and journalist organizations defend press freedom, and to be part of the de facto alliance that, by resisting the Arroyo administration's attack on the press and working for the enhancement of professional and ethical media practice, is at the same time defending what remains of Philippine democracy. The College will remain vigilant and continue to watch her, her government and all her minions; and remain critical of all her actions."

"Consistent with the call of the University Council of UP Diliman as early as 2005 for President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's resignation, the UP College of Mass Communication believes that her removal from office can help create a better media environment in the country. Let it not be said that the College chooses to be silent as media repression continues under this administration."

— "Under Siege and Fighting Back," Statement of the University of the Philippines Diliman College of Mass Communication on the state of the media under the Arroyo regime, July 28

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Arroyo

EXEQUIEL SUPERA-OPS/NIB

Sober reportage

CHEERS TO *Newsbreak* and the *Manila Bulletin* for exercising good news value judgment over Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's health condition and, in particular, her breast implant fix. Cheers to *Philippine Star* columnist Jarius Bondoc for noting a crucial point missed by most beat reporting—Arroyo's lack of transparency on matters of public concern, including her health.

Last July 2, the *Bulletin* published a sober and unembellished report on the President's stay at the Asian Hospital and Medical Center in Alabang, Muntinlupa due to a self-imposed "quarantine" following her recent trip abroad ("GMA medical check up OK"). The news report rightly focused on Arroyo's state of health, and revealed that, contrary to official Malacañang statements assuring a "clean bill of health" for the President, she was scheduled to have a cyst or lump removed in addition to augmentation mammoplasty.

The reporting was without the sensationalist spin other national dailies took, which chose to excessively fixate public attention on Arroyo's breast implants and augmentation, and used the terms "boobs" and "boob job/s" liberally.

Last July 3, *Newsbreak* explained that as early as 2006, it already had knowledge of Arroyo's breast implants from an "unimpeachable source". It explained, however, that *Newsbreak* decided against writing a story on the breast enhancement procedure because "it's really none of our business if she wanted padded boobs."

The matter of breast augmentation was more of a personal

decision than a public issue, unless there are other conditions that make it an issue of collective concern. *Newsbreak* provided an example: the use of public funds for the breast implants. Whether Arroyo squandered public funds to satisfy vanity is precisely what Bondoc's July 3 commentary "Thanked by Arroyo, Trumped by Customs" posed to the public. According to the commentary, "Hospitalizing a President isn't easy. Patients in five rooms at the VIP 10th floor had to be moved, to billet bodyguards and cooks; P4,000@, or total P20,000 a day. Arroyo was given two connecting suites, P18,000@, or total P36,000 a day, one for her, the other for the family."

This was followed by another column piece on July 6, "Caught lying, but still secretive about health". Bondoc placed the President's state of health in the larger context of the need for her transparency as well her Cabinet officials'. The piece pointed out that, "The President's health is a state concern; she has the duty to disclose, and citizens have the right to know. Feigning self-quarantine was devious."

Certainly, the state of health of the president is a public issue in so far as it affects performance and ability, and even state of mind. Then President Ferdinand Marcos was rumored in the 1980s to have lupus erythematosus. The mosquito press immediately tried to confirm the rumor's authenticity. Whether Marcos indeed had lupus, and if so, whether the disease was in its advanced stage, was of relevance to Philippine society because the answers would suggest, among others, a change of leaders or a transfer of power. ■

JEER OF THE MONTH

Fluff

JEERS TO the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* for its frothy coverage of the 80th birthday of Imelda Marcos, widow of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

"In true Imeldific fashion, she glided down a red carpet, surrounded by little girls in white dresses carrying bouquets of roses and trailed by tuxedo-wearing violin and flute players who rendered her favorite love song", began writer Larry Leviste in his July 4 front-page report of Imelda's event ("Imelda Marcos: The best and worst life").

Leviste's account was all shallow glitz and glitter: it faithfully reported such details as the luxurious international cuisine and the nonstop music; the number and names of the socialites who attended as well as the dresses and jewelry they wore; and the presidential wannabes, politicians, showbiz celebrities, and relatives who greeted Imelda at the party. At *Inquirer.net*, Leviste's front-page article was filed under the "People, Fashion, Lifestyle



Imelda Marcos LITO OCAMPO

(House & Home)" category.

Former Sen. Francisco Tatad, who was the first Minister of Information during martial law, wrote a glowing front-page commentary about Imelda. "The political rubbish she has received since her husband Ferdinand fell from power and died has failed to dent her self-confidence. She still thinks of doing things for the poor as though she had never left her job in human settlements," Tatad wrote. ("Imelda's toughest battle is in media") None of the court cases filed against the Marcoses has moved for lack of evidence, he added.

Not content with three stories about Imelda (two of them front-page), hers was the paper's main front-page photo that day. "Still 'Imeldific' At 80," said the *Inquirer* photo caption. "Former First Lady Imelda Marcos celebrates her 80th birthday wearing a gown in 'frantic fuchsia' attended by a thousand at the ballroom of Sofitel, formerly the Philippine Plaza, the hotel she built by the bay in the '70s. It's a night of nonstop singing and food binging with kilometer buffet tables heavy with the cuisine of six nations spread though several function rooms adjacent to the ballroom. The guests say their last good nights in the wee hours."

Is it even necessary to say that the *Inquirer*—founded during the last days of the Marcos dictatorship and with a reputation as a critical opposition paper—could have used the event as a peg to discuss issues far more substantial, such as the capacity (or lack thereof) of the government to recover Marcoses' ill-gotten wealth and the rampant and still unresolved human rights abuses under martial law? ■



PRINT

No Explanation

JEERS TO the Manila broadsheets for failing to explain what the Philippines' being the US' "chief coordinator" for Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) means.

In their Aug. 1 reportage, the *Manila Standard Today*, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *The Daily Tribune* and *The Philippine Star*, bannered that US President Barack Obama appointed the Philippines as "chief coordinator" for US relations to the ASEAN, as well as chair of the Non-Proliferation Treaty conference next year. The *Bulletin* reported the same thing in its Aug. 1 page 6 report "Obama picks RP as country coordinator for ASEAN".

While the reports did say that the designation did not seem to herald any concrete benefits for the Filipino people, in part because the US may have other motivations in designating the Philippines as



Obama HTTP://WWW.PCPO.PH

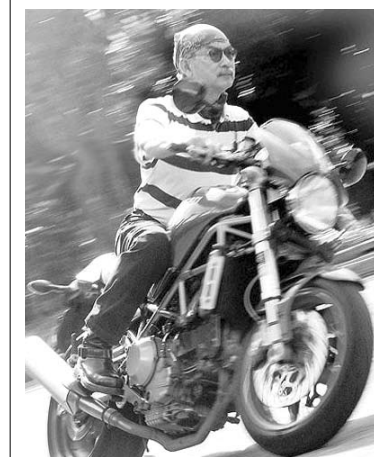
conference chair and chief coordinator, they failed to say what the designation entailed. Neither was it explained how Obama could assign the Philippines, supposedly a sovereign republic, such a role in the ASEAN. The ASEAN members are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Jumping to conclusions

JEERS TO the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* for over-reading. Last June 26, it headlined that Randy David, Universi-

ty of the Philippines professor and *Inquirer* columnist, was "ready to run" against President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo "should she seek a seat in the House representing the second district of their home province of Pampanga in 2010." ("UP prof ready to run vs Arroyo: David vs Goliath")

Looking at David's quotes in the paper, however, revealed that he did not exactly say he was ready to run against Arroyo but that he **will think about it if she runs** (emphasis by *PJR Reports*). "If she runs, I will think about it very seriously. Yes, I think so. She will not go unchallenged. She will not



David HTTP://WWW.INQUIRER.NET



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go unopposed; we will oppose her every step of the way,” David told *Inquirer*. “It’s probably the most foolish thing to do. I know it’s quixotic to run against the President—somebody who has no qualms about using all the powers of her office—but I think somebody has to stop her. And if we get to that point, I will do my part even if that may be myself,” David added.



Bolante LITO OCAMPO

Still on-target

CHEERS TO the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* for asking: whatever happened to Joc-joc? Last June 13, the *Inquirer* noted that despite the Senate blue ribbon committee’s recommendation to prosecute former agriculture undersecretary Jocelyn “Joc-joc” Bolante and nine others for their involvement in the alleged P728-million fertilizer fund scam, he has neither been charged or cleared of charges.

The *Inquirer* added that Bolante had announced his plans to run as governor or congressman in his home province of Capiz. Quoting Senate blue ribbon committee chair Sen. Richard Gordon, the *Inquirer* also said that Bolante would run for governor in the province where “most of the fertilizer funds ended up.”

Editorializing

JEERS TO *The Daily Tribune* for editorializing in the news columns.

In his keynote speech at the Baguio City Golf and Country Club on July 10, former Pres. Fidel Ramos described Defense Sec. Gilbert Teodoro as “incomparably competent”. On July 13, *Tribune* noted that Ramos “titillated...Teodoro with his psy-war antics.” How Ramos’ description became part of psy-war antics or exactly which war he was supposedly implicating, the article did

not explain further. (“FVR flatters Gibo, but comes short of endorsing prexy bid,” p. 1).

Teodoro’s description of Ramos as a “leader’s leader,” was also described in the same report as “flattery.” *Tribune* added that “Ramos’ body language and actuations suggested that he was indeed thrilled over the prospect of a Teodoro presidency”, but offered no quotes to support this claim.

Legal context

CHEERS TO the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* columnist Joaquin Bernas for providing the legal context of martial law. In his “Sounding Board” column on July 12 and 20, Bernas explained the constitutional provisions and legal issues relevant to the martial law issue (“What is martial law?”). Amid widespread speculations that President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is planning to declare martial law, Bernas—a noted constitutionalist and legal expert—also explained why the Supreme Court allowed the declaration of martial law under Ferdinand Marcos and the possibilities of imposing it again at present. ■



Arroyo LITO OCAMPO



Going Green

CHEERS TO TV5’s *The Evening News (TEN)* for a three-day report which explained what a carbon footprint is, its relation to global warming, and the latter’s impact on the Philippines and its people (“*Dokumentado: ‘Carbon footprint’ ni Jade Lopez [Documented: ‘Carbon Footprint’ by Jade Lopez]*”).

The segment, “Jade’s Planet: The Green Series”, discussed the



LITO OCAMPO

complex issue of global warming in terms of the average individual’s experience. For the first episode, *TEN* showed how housewives can save 30-35 percent in electrical and other expenses by reducing the household’s carbon footprint (June 22). A household can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by simply knowing the proper use of appliances, switching from incandescent bulbs to fluorescent lights, and unplugging appliances that are not in use.

TEN offered viewers recycling tips from Payatas, a dumpsite area in Manila, in reducing their carbon footprint (June 23). A landslide nine years ago in Payatas killed more than 300 people when a mountain of garbage collapsed on their homes. Now, its residents are learning ways to properly manage waste.

The last report compared the carbon footprint of families in the Philippines with that of other countries (June 24). *TEN* said the Philippines is one of the countries with the lowest contributions of carbon emissions which trigger global warming. It cited studies by the United Nations and the environmental group Greenpeace. But even then, the report emphasized, 56 million Filipinos and more could be affected by the continuing rise of the global surface temperature.

Supernatural idiocy

JEERS TO *The Evening News (TEN)* for using an unscientific and backward approach in a report on the chances of possible presidential candidates in the 2010 elections.

The report “*Dokumentado: ‘Hulaan Blues’ ni Fiona Rozario [Documented: ‘Forecast Blues’ by*

Fiona Rozario)” consulted psychics, dream and symbol experts, and tarot card readers to figure out the plans of Pres. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and the possible reactions to her leaving and/or staying in power beyond 2010 (July 2). The psychics echoed the scenarios most often mentioned in the news: the elections pushing through despite controversies, Charter Change, Arroyo running as representative, etc.

The reporter contradicted the point of her presentation and said, “*Hindi na natin kailangan maging manghuhula pa para malaman natin na lahat ng nangyayari sa ating buhay at sa ating bansa ay pinili natin at bunga ng ating mga desisyon... dapat bantayan natin ang bawat kilos ng mga nasa pwesto ngayon* (We don’t need fortune tellers to know that we chose everything that is happening in our lives and in our country and these are the results of our decisions...we need



to watch over the actions of those in power).”

For the second part, the report discussed the psychics’ readings of the chances of the possible presidential candidates and focused on good luck charms, which, it turns out, most of them seem to believe in (July 3). *TEN* did not reveal who these candidates are and left viewers guessing as the psychics enumerated their characteristics.

In closing, the reporter said “*Aminin na natin. Dismayado man tayo sa nangyayari sa ating bansa, wala tayong dapat sisihin kundi ang ating mga sarili dahil tayo ang pumipili ng ating mga lider. Kaya kung sawa ka na sa sistema, sa susunod na eleksyon, mag-isip ka at bumoto ng tama* (Let’s admit it. We may be dismayed with what is happening in our country, but we cannot blame anyone except ourselves because we chose our leaders. If you’re tired of the system, next elections, think and vote right).”

To be fair, *TEN* is neither the first nor the only news program with a fascination for fortune tellers. News programs from major networks ABS-CBN 2 and GMA-7 are also guilty of this tendency to

focus on trivial issues and personalities and to encourage superstition as a substitute for rational analysis. But that doesn’t mean it has to keep doing it.



LITO OCAMPO

Context

CHEERS TO *24 Oras* for providing context to a spot report on a vehicular accident.

The July 21 “Alerto 24” report explained how police and rescue workers should respond to an accident in relation to its story of a man who died allegedly after being run over by a taxicab.



Update on the peace process

CHEERS TO *MindaNews* for its piece on the newest government initiatives to revive talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and in addressing various problems in Central Mindanao. Negotiations between the MILF and the gov-





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ernment have been at a standstill since Aug. 2008 after the stalled signing of the memorandum of agreement on ancestral domain.

In its July 16 report ("Peace with the MILF: From DDR to RRR to HELP-CM"), *MindaNews* reported the creation of the Health, Education, Livelihood, Progress Task Force-Central Mindanao (HELP-CM) under Administrative Order 267. HELP-CM aims to "forg(e) a peaceful, negotiated, final political settlement with the MILF"; "address concerns arising from continued hostilities"; "reduce the impact of the conflict on the communities"; and "pursu(e) 'humanitarian offensives' to address the root causes of conflict." Pres. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo allotted P10 million for the task force.

MindaNews also provided a brief background on current developments in the MILF-GRP peace negotiations.

Attribution failure



JEERS TO *Inquirer.net* for confusing readers on the source of an interview on which they based a front-page news story.

Last June 18, the *Inquirer.net* reported the views of presidential son and Pampanga Rep. Juan Miguel "Mikey" Arroyo on rumors that Pres. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is seeking his congressional seat in the 2010 elections ("Mikey may give way to ma: *Arroyo son to run for gov vs Panlilio*").

The report said that Arroyo aired his views "in an interview yesterday, a day after his arrival from a US visit." Thus, it would not be surprising if online readers think that an *Inquirer.net* reporter (or a reporter from its parent company, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*) had conducted the interview.

However, it turns out that the interview had originated from



Arroyo

LITO OCAMPO

GMA News.TV, a news website and a major competitor of *Inquirer.net*. The *GMA News.TV* report, which contained the quotes from Arroyo, was posted a day earlier than the *Inquirer.net* version ("No stopping Arroyo if she wants House seat, son says").

The *Inquirer* used the same Arroyo interview in its June 18 banner story ("Mikey may give way to ma: If so, GMA son to run for gov vs 'Among' Ed"). Although the paper cited "*GMA News*" as the source of the interview, readers might have assumed that it was not *GMA News.TV* but the news department of GMA-7. (GMA-7 is the parent company of *GMA News.TV*) that did the interview.



Revilla

[HTTP://WWW.BONGREVILLA.MULTIPLY.COM](http://www.bongrevilla.multiply.com)

profiles and resumés of senators as well as government officials. At the end of the profiles and resumés, *Inquirer.net* writes: "© Copyright 2009 INQUIRER.net."



Overseas Voters' Guide



CHEERS TO *GMA News.TV* for its online interactive guide for overseas Filipinos who want to register for the 2010 national elections (<http://www.gmanews.tv/story/166436/How-overseas-Pinoys-can-register-to-vote-in-2010>). The guide explains the registration process for those working abroad, as well as seafarers and those departing for abroad. An overview of Republic Act No. 9189 ("The Overseas Absentee Voting Act of 2003") is also available online (<http://images.gmanews.tv/pdf/oav.pdf>).

Non-attribution



JEERS TO *Inquirer.net* for non-attribution of information which appears in national government websites.

The *Inquirer.net* microsite "Inquirer Politics" published the

All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed."

It turns out that most, if not all of the information contained in those articles came from either the Senate website or the Office of the President website.

No wonder some of the profiles were skewed in favor of the subject. The profile on Sen. Lito Lapid, for example, says: "Despite the limitations in education and against the shroud of cynicisms (sic) on his capabilities, Senator Lapid proved himself to be... an inspiring picture of hope for those whose lives he has touched."

And from Sen. Ramon Revilla Jr.'s profile: "The true measure of a man is not found in what he can do, nor in what he intends to do, but in what he has done and in what he is doing.' Never has one so young achieved so much so soon!"

The *Inquirer.net* is the official news website of its parent company the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. ■

Reporting health crises: Hit-and-miss coverage

■ By Edsel Van DT. Dura

MUCH OF the local media reports during the early weeks of the influenza A(H1N1) virus outbreak consisted mostly of regular news reports and update.

The online news media sites produced more reports compared to television and print which obviously had to work against space and air time constraints. Online news organizations like *abs-cbnNEWS.com*, *GMA News.TV*, and *Inquirer.net* have compiled these reports in their microsites (<http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/list/swine%20flu>; <http://blogs.gmanews.tv/downwiththeflu/> and; <http://www.inquirer.net/specialreports/swinefluoutbreak/>).

But in reporting new incidents, some reports still described the virus as "deadly" even as around 95 percent of those confirmed to have fallen ill from it recovered. Some reports warned the public that the virus could mutate into a more virulent and possibly incurable strain, which health officials said could be the "second wave" of the A(H1N1) pandemic. But they failed to mention that the virus may also mutate into an even milder form.

In the June 29 *Inquirer.net* report titled "H1N1 can mutate into 'milder' strain" (<http://www.inquirer.net/specialreports/swinefluoutbreak/view.php?db=1&article=20090629-213008>), Yolanda Oliveros, director of the National Center for Disease Prevention and Control, said: "Based on worldwide data, a virus needs at least 6 months to a year before it can mutate. And this mutation not exactly means that the virus will be more virulent in form, it can also be milder." She added that vaccination for seasonal flu may not prevent A(H1N1), but will prevent it from mutating. But the article failed to say how and why it will entirely prevent or reduce mutation since Yolanda was the only source for the information.

This was more or less the way the media covered the A(H1N1) outbreak. Few of the many stories generated offered new information about the virus or corrected previous errors as well as speculation.

This partly contributed to the public confusion which led to misplaced fears over the real danger of A(H1N1) as evidenced by news stories on the suspen-

sion of classes in several schools, and even the shutdown of the House of Representatives when a staff member of that chamber who had contracted the virus died, among others.

Some information also came a little too late. The *GMA News.TV* reports "Using masks may hike chances of swine flu infection" (June 15; <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/164972/Using-masks-may-hike-chances-of-swine-flu-infection>) and "A Primer on Swine Flu" (June 17; <http://blogs.gmanews.tv/downwiththeflu/2009/06/17/a-primer-on-swine-flu/>), for instance, were informative but were published only around a month and a half after A(H1N1) was first reported in the local media.

Local news organizations have not been prepared in reporting health crises, as was evident during the SARS and avian flu scare several years ago. What's needed are reporters with strong science and medical backgrounds or research capabilities who can specialize in reporting such events.

Research could have filled the information gap even without such reporters. The media, for example, could have provided stories with comparative statistical analysis on the deaths and recoveries to put the potential risks of A(H1N1) in better perspective.

The July 4 *Inquirer.net* article "50% of flu victims in their teens, pre-teens" (<http://www.inquirer.net/specialreports/swinefluoutbreak/view.php?db=1&article=20090704-213836>) could have been a notable effort to interpret data on A(H1N1) but did not discuss the topic any further. Eric Tayag, director of the DOH epidemiology center, was quoted in the report as saying that more severe cases may occur when younger and older age groups are affected. But the report did not say why teens were more susceptible to the virus than young adults.

The press was aggressive in monitoring and reporting A(H1N1) cases. It may be one of the reasons why the Philippines has emerged as one of the countries with the most number of confirmed A(H1N1) cases. Unfortunately much of the reports were not matched by the explanatory articles that were needed to provide the public an accurate sense of what the pandemic was all about. ■



'T WAS THE SEASON FOR CHA-CHA/SONA

HTTP://WWW.PIA.GOV.PH

■ By Kathryn Roja G. Raymundo

IF ITS extensive coverage of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's ninth State of the Nation Address (SONA) and the recurring issue of Charter Change (Cha-cha) is any gauge, the Philippine press has no problem reporting the most recent events that are of public concern. But it's in the quality department where the press often suffers, with its excessive reliance on sound bites, the focus on the trivial, and the lack of context.



Photos by LITO OCAMPO

WHILE THE rest of the country was abed last June 2, the House of Representatives approved House Resolution (HR) No. 1109, which seeks to amend or revise the 1987 Constitution through a constituent assembly (con-ass) without the participation of the Senate.

All Philippine presidents after former President Corazon "Cory" Aquino have tried to

change the Constitution in its entirety or in selected parts, and in various ways possible. And yet, the press has failed to make the public understand the value of this issue.

As a result, the same old questions surfaced in the wake of HR 1109—and most remain unanswered. Does the Constitution really have to be amended? Is the present Charter inadequate as far

While you were sleeping

as improving the lives of Filipinos is concerned? How will Cha-cha affect governance and the provision and delivery of social services? What are the specific provisions, articles, and sections that will be or need to be amended or deleted altogether? What new provisions are likely to be added should the proponents of Cha-cha succeed? Is there any connection between the campaign to amend

the Constitution and the forthcoming 2010 elections?

PJR Reports monitored three newspapers (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *The Philippine Star*, and *Manila Bulletin*), three primetime news programs (*TV Patrol World*, *24 Oras*, and *Teledyaryo*), and selected online news sites from June 1 to 15.

Transcript journalism

As usual, the daily coverage depended almost entirely on the statements and reactions of the people and sectors immediately involved. The reports contributed little to providing new information to the discussion of the issues of Cha-cha. This was especially evident in the coverage by television news programs.

The news reports consisted mostly of interviews with critics of Constitutional amendments, members of the House who belong to the opposition, and senators against administration allies pushing for it, and the denials of Malacañang that it's behind the con-ass.

The media organizations covered live the anti-Cha-cha/con-ass rally in Makati last June 10. Both *TV Patrol* and *24 Oras* had a segment (man-on-the-street interviews) which showed that some of the people who joined the protest did not know what con-ass or Cha-cha is ("*Ilang sumali sa rally sa Makati, umaming 'di naiintindihan ang con-ass* [Some of the people who joined the rally in Makati, admitted they don't understand con-ass]" and "*Ano ang constituent assembly; alam kaya ng mga tao ang ibig sabihin* [What is constituent assembly; do people know what it means]"). With the media's he-said, she-said type of reporting, should we even be surprised at this finding?

If the public does not know what's happening, the supporters



of con-ass, led by no other than the Speaker of the House, do not know better. In what could be described as "transcript journalism", the press did little to demand explanations from government officials who insist on changing the Constitution now. For example, when asked what they plan to do after passing the resolution, the *Star* quoted Speaker Prospero Nograles as saying "I don't know. I will consult the rules committee and the (House) leadership on what to do next. Perhaps when we return in July, we can convene as a con-ass. I don't know." ("GMA House allies OK Senate-less con-ass", June 3, Banner and "Con-ass: P20 M More 'pork' per congressman", June 4, Banner)

The concerns of the multitude

However, some news reports did refer to studies and surveys which show the near-universal opposition to Cha-cha, whether through a people's initiative, a constituent assembly, or a constitutional convention. Public opposition is apparently linked to perceptions that amendments would allow Arroyo to stay in power beyond the end of her term next year.

Last June 3, *TV Patrol* reported the Pulse Asia nationwide survey on Cha-cha (Feb. 2 to 15, 2009; 1,200 respondents) which said 42% are against Cha-cha and that 64% do not think it appropriate to amend the Constitution at this time.

The *Star*'s "Inbox World" asked its readers to share their



thoughts on the resurrection of Cha-cha in the House (June 12). Some respondents said let's give Cha-cha a chance as it is "urgently needed", while others viewed it as a desperate move that is bound to fail. Some *Star* readers said the renewed campaign to amend the Constitution is "an act of betrayal of the people," and urged everyone to be vigilant.

The new communication technologies have ushered in new ways of expressing criticism and thus provided more platforms for dialogue and debate on the issue. Outside the monitor period of *PJR Reports*, individuals and groups launched the "Blog Action Day vs #conass" (<http://www.blogger-skapihan.com/2009/07/26/blog-action-day-entries/>). Users of social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook, and Plurk participated in droves. (To access entries and updates, search #conass in both Twitter and Plurk. For Facebook, type-in Pilipinas Kontra Conass [<http://www.facebook.com/pilipinas.kontra.conass?ref=nfj>])

In-depth reports

Only the online alternative news site *Bulatlat* looked into the

other possible motives for Cha-cha. In a two-part series, Arnold Padilla wrote, "The political dimension of charter change has dominated the national agenda. But the constant driving force behind all the attempts since the last decade to modify the Constitution has been the external pressure coming mainly from the WTO, the US, the EU and other rich countries to create the sort of policy environment that will allow globalization to fully thrive in the Philippines." (<http://www.bulatlat.com/main/2009/07/06/apart-from-politics-pressure-from-wto-us-eu-drives-charter-change-bid/> and <http://www.bulatlat.com/main/2009/07/09/us-wish-list-vs-philippine-constitution-drives-american-lobby-for-cha-cha/>)

As in most other public issues, it was the commentaries that provided the much needed analyses, explications, and background. The columns and editorials in the broadsheets have to be credited for discussing and holding on to the following issues: the P20-million additional pork barrel fund allocations allegedly given to representatives who will vote for HR 1109, the

legitimacy of convening a con-ass without the Senate, and the "plans" of Arroyo to stay in power after 2010 (declare Martial Law, extend her term of office, or be the prime minister through a House seat).

Sara Soliven de Guzman, who writes the "As A Matter of Fact" column in the *Star*, reviewed past Cha-cha efforts by the three administrations after Aquino ("Do we really need a Con-Ass", June 8).

Inquirer columnist Fr. Joaquin Bernas, S.J. wrote in "Making sense of 1109" that "at best...1109 was a solemn proclamation that the House of Representatives was ready to defy the Constitution and push for revision of the Constitution without the cooperation of the Senate." He added that the session on that Tuesday night was unclear and unsubstantial, and that it would be very difficult to push for the congressional dream of "Arroyo Forever". ("Sounding board", June 8)

In his *Star* column, "Postscript", Federico Pascual Jr. enumerated five obstacles to con-ass which led him to believe that it would most likely not prosper: the Senate, the Supreme Court, the mass media, the people, and the calendar. Pascual discussed articles and sections in the Constitution that explain the need for the Senate's participation in convening the con-ass. He quoted Dean Artemio G. Tuquero of the MLQ (Manuel L. Quezon) School of Law as saying, "The power to amend the Constitution is vested in Congress, not in either House thereof. Hence, not even a unanimous vote of all the members of the House would be enough to propose an amendment to, or revision of, the 1987 Constitution. The concurrence of the Senate, by a vote of three-fourths of all its members, is required to consider such [a] proposal as an act of Congress" ("No need to panic on Cha-cha reso", June 7). ■



Gloria's ninth—and last?

FOR THE State of the Nation Address (SONA) coverage, *PJR Reports* monitored three newspapers (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *The Philippine Star*, and *Manila Bulletin*), three news programs (*TV Patrol World*, *24 Oras*, and *Teledyaryo*), select public affairs programs, the specials by ABS-CBN 2, ANC, GMA-7, NBN-4, and various online sources from July 27 to 31.

Given the context in which the 2009 SONA, supposedly the last for Pres. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, was delivered, the cov-

erage was comprehensive. But most news organizations found the address wanting and full of half-truths. Others went further by saying in their opinion pages that every single achievement Arroyo claimed was a lie. Most of the newspapers and the networks interviewed administration allies who were saying otherwise. But as the op-ed pages noted, the problem lies in Arroyo and her cabinet's credibility. There is also the clamor for Arroyo to categorically say she will step down in 2010, deny she will seek a House seat to



become prime minister or extend her term in any other way, and ask her House allies to withdraw HR 1109 which seeks to convene a constitutional assembly to amend the Charter. At the least, the public was expecting a categorical statement on whether or not she will still push for Cha-cha before her term expires.

The reports and commentaries highlighted Arroyo's ignoring public opinion. Most news organizations pointed out that rather than a report to the nation, the SONA was an attack on detractors

and a defense of the administration's many controversial decisions. According to critical analyses, the SONA as many expected brought nothing new and became just another opportunity for the President to grandstand rather than tell the people what the real state of the country is. Arroyo maintained that "I did not become president to be popular. To work, to lead, to protect and preserve our country, our people, that is why I became president."

ABS-CBN 2 released the last SONA of former President Corason "Cory" Aquino in 1991 and compared it to the speech of Arroyo last July 27. It reported "*dating Pangulong Aquino, tiniyak noon sa taumbayan na bababa siya sa puwesto* (former President Aquino assured the public then that she would step down)." GMA-7 also aired a similar report, "FVR at Cory, mas malinaw noon tungkol sa pagbaba sa puwesto kaysa kay Pangulong Arroyo [FVR and Cory declared they will step down unlike President Arroyo] (July 28)"

Reviews and analyses

A week prior to the SONA, some news organizations had already released their own reviews and analyses of the past eight years of the Arroyo administration. The press discussed the highlights and unfulfilled promises of past SONAs. Many individuals and media organizations also provided score cards for the President and fact-checked her speech. Others provided background by reviewing issues and scandals involving the President and her husband.

The *Inquirer* published a series of report called "9 Years of Arroyo: A review" written by different experts to examine the conditions of the economy, peace and order, human rights, the justice system, education, health, and environment under the present government. The *Inquirer* also asked its readers to grade the governance of Arroyo in terms of fighting graft and corruption, reducing poverty, keeping peace and order, enforcing the law equally, and delivering social services. Most readers said she "has done little or none at all."

An independent development institution, Ibon Foundation Inc., measured the performance of Arroyo against the goals she set for the government in her first SONA on July 23, 2001 ("SONA 2001 revisited: Performance against targets", July 26). Ibon found that Arroyo failed to address such issues as poverty, unemployment, debt service, high prices and low wages, etc.

University of the Philippines

The reports and commentaries highlighted Arroyo's ignoring public opinion

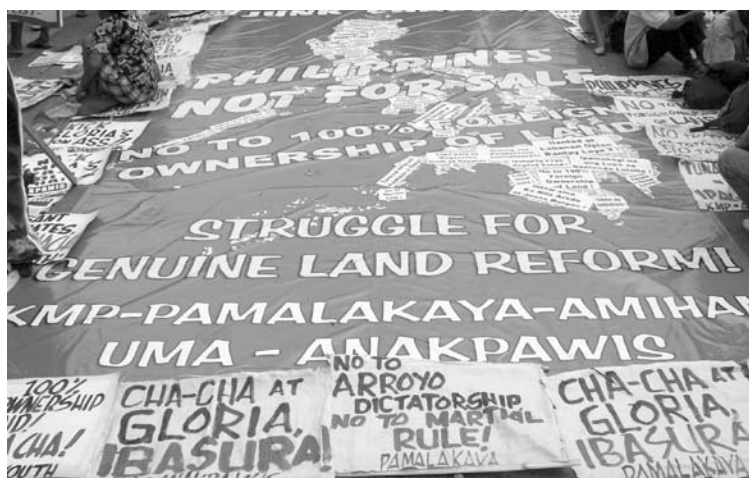
Professor of Public Administration Prospero E. de Vera was one of the first to examine the SONA 2009 speech—how much of its claims were fact and how much of it was fiction ("Beat the Odds: Fact check", <http://popoy-devera.blogspot.com/2009/07/beat-odds-fact-check-part-1.html> and <http://popoy-devera.blogspot.com/2009/07/beat-odds-fact-check-part-2.html>).

The *Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ)* published last July 25 "The SONAs of Gloria", a series on "the failed promises, the statistical inconsistencies in government economic data, and by all indications, the illusory growth that nine years of the Arroyo Administration would leave as a legacy to the Filipino people." *PCIJ* compiled statements on various issues by organizations challenging the administration's programs and policies. *PCIJ* also published a scorecard for Arroyo by Dr. Benjamin Diokno, former budget secretary and currently a UP School of Economics professor, using her vision of governance "Beat the Odds" (B for balanced budget; E for education for all; A for automated elections; T for transport and digital infrastructure; T for terminating NPA/MILF hostilities; H for healing the wounds of EDSA 1,2 and 3; E for electricity and water for all; O for opportunity to create 10 million jobs; D for decongest Metro Manila; and DS for develop Subic-Clark hub). Arroyo scored a conditional failure. (<http://www.pcij.org/blog/?p=3859> and <http://www.pcij.org/stories/2009/sona4.html>).

Missed opportunities

While ABS-CBN 2, ANC, and NBN-4 continued their special coverage and provided initial analysis after the President's speech, GMA-7 almost immediately went back to regular programming.

24 Oras reported "Pacquiao at iba pang natatanging Pilipino, binanggit ng pangulo sa kanyang SONA (the President acknowledged Pacquiao and other notable Filipinos in her SONA)." The news did not explain that these people were used by Arroyo as human props. The presence of



prominent personalities in the SONA had no connection with Arroyo's governance record. ("Personalidad sa SONA [Personalities at the SONA]", July 27)

PJR Reports observed that fashion during the SONA has become a staple story every year. Who was wearing what is arguably of human interest. But most of the reports this year had a tendency to perpetuate stereotypes—e.g., the President is a woman, and women are expected to dress up for special occasions. In most stories, the outfits of the men were not a concern. Relegated to the sidelines were discussions on the lavishness of the designer gowns and the jewelry that adorned the women, whether members of Congress themselves or congressional wives. ("Mga mambabatas, nagpabonggahan ng kasuotan sa SONA [Lawmakers out-do each other in SONA Fashion]", *TV Patrol*, July 27; "SONA Fashion", 24 Oras, July 27; @inquirerdotnet tweets, July 27)

But *abs-cbnNEWS.com/Newsbreak's* "GMA's fashion legacy a 'hit and miss'" had a different perspective on the President's fashion legacy. The article claimed that "aside from her 'hit and miss' fashion style, the designers said Arroyo's administration has also failed to support the Filipino fashion industry in terms of funding, support, and promotions." (<http://newsbreak.com>.

http://index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6477&Itemid=88889150, July 24)

Government mouthpiece

The government owned- and controlled-television and radio stations NBN-4, RPN-9, IBC-13, and *Radyo ng Bayan* (Radio of the Nation) predictably served as the President's public relation agencies.

The anchors and field reporters of these stations quirkily called each other "Ka-SONA" and greeted everyone "Happy SONA". The main point of their reportage was that the country is doing well thanks to the efforts of the executive department. They also mentioned the need for the legislature to continue helping the President achieve her goals. Everyone emphasized that the economy and unity are the thrusts of this government. Interviewed over NBN-4 and company, Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile and PLDT and Smart Communications Chair Manny Pangilinan even tagged Arroyo as the "best" president as far as the economy is concerned. Other officials commended the President for her strongly worded speech while others said it was just right for the President to finally answer her critics.

Almost all cabinet secretaries from the environment department to economic planning talked about this administration's suc-

cess in separate interviews. Most echoed in detail the statistics mentioned by the President as well as highlighted the positive effects of her projects. The reactions reported by NBN-4 etc. after the SONA were all favorable.

The coverage was oblivious to the criticisms hurled against the President, the controversies that hound her administration, and the rallies outside the *Batasang Pambansa* (National Legislature).

Going online

The news organizations are learning to use the new communications technologies to their advantage.

Credit should be given to *GMAnews.TV* for being the first to deliver live news feeds while providing a platform to discuss and debate national issues. *GMAnews.TV* used Facebook Connect, which used the Web 2.0 service allowing Facebook users to comment on a topic while simultaneously watching a live stream of the event. (<http://www.gmanews.tv/livestreaming>)

Internet users used the microblogging site Twitter to post news stories, photos, comments, and links related to the SONA (search #SONA to view posts). Twitter also allowed direct communication among the sources and consumers of news.

News organizations as well as interested individuals and groups built various microsites about the SONA. The *Inquirer* has "SONA 2009: State of the Nation Address," which contains all articles by the paper and its net version, a running account of the SONA, and a feedback mechanism for readers and viewers (<http://www.inquirer.net/specialreports/sona2009/>). ABS-CBN 2 has "SONA 2009" which includes stories, slideshows, a report card on Arroyo from 2001 to 2009, and other information available for downloading (<http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/sona2009>).

The government through the online site of the Office of the President also provided texts and videos of the SONA (http://www.op.gov.ph/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=16&Itemid=42). *SunStar* "SONA 2009" coverage (<http://www.ustream.tv/channel/sunstar-sona-coverage>) and Presidential Broadcast Staff Radio Television Malacanang (<http://rtvm.gov.ph/>) provided live streaming of the NBN-4 SONA coverage.

While the result was a flood of information, what still mattered was its relevance and accuracy: areas in which the record of government media has not been first, or even second-rate. ■

Gloria Arroyo, Traveling

Gloria Arroyo has been described as “peripatetic”, “nomadic”, “most traveled”, and “jetsetting”

■ By Alaysa Tagumpay E. Escandor

GLOBE-TROTTERING is something many have dreamed of, but only a lucky few can afford to do so. There is more than a slight incongruity in the fact that the president of a poor country can boast of making more than 50 trips across all continents except Africa and Antarctica in the eight years she’s been in power. And she did so with pomp, always flying on a chartered plane with a full delegation that sometimes includes wives, husbands, and children.

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has been described as “peripatetic”, “nomadic”, “most traveled”, and “jetsetting”. The reports of *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *Manila Bulletin*, *The Philippine Star*, *The Daily Tribune*, ABS-CBN 2 and GMA-7 on Arroyo’s travels were monitored from July 1 to August 14. The press was able to cover Arroyo’s foreign—and local—trips, keeping track of her travels’ destinations (see table). What was missing was sufficient explanation on the nature, agenda and the public benefit, if any, of those trips.

Lazy reporting

Travels that were more pleasure—or political payback—than business are common in Philippine history. Official junkets go back to the Commonwealth era, reaching the height of notoriety during the Martial Law period when then President Ferdinand Marcos and First Lady Imelda traveled and partied across countries with unhampered profligacy. The country learned that, citing national interest, heads of state made foreign travels whose agenda were actually farthest from national interest. It was during one of these trips, for instance, that some of Marcos’ ill-gotten wealth was deposited to Swiss banks and invested in real-estate properties in New York.

The same profligacy has characterized Arroyo’s trips, as several

opinion columns and editorials in the *Inquirer* have pointed out. News articles in the *Inquirer*, *Star* and *Tribune* also called attention to the consistently huge delegation that accompanied Arroyo, ranging from 74 congressmen in June last year to 59 in the same month this year.

What should have been routine to media was not. For the most part, the press failed to provide the information that could have enabled the public to fully appreciate the impact of Arroyo’s travels on the country and its foreign relations.

But is inclusion in Arroyo’s retinue when she travels a form of political payback? The media could have noted how those who travel with her have voted on key issues, particularly those where the President has a large stake, such as the impeachment case and House Resolution 1109.

Moreover, the actual expenses on foreign trips can be revealed and “audited as they are covered by public documents”, Press Sec. Cerge Remonde said in an interview with *GMA News TV* on June 22. It was not until June 26, however, that reports on the total expenses of Arroyo’s trips first found their way to print and broadcast media, in large part because of Sen. Francis Escudero, who revealed that Arroyo’s total travel costs since 2001 have reached P3 billion, thus exceeding the travel bud-



Gloria and Jose Miguel Arroyo

MARCELINO PASCUA/OPS-NIB

get allocated for the Office of the President. He also revealed that the original budget for travel in 2007 was P300.2 million, but later ballooned to P693 million. Meanwhile, in 2008, the budget for travel increased to P408.6 million, and in 2009, to P436 million. The reports, however, did not mention the incongruity of this allocation in light of the limited budget for social services.

This crucial information on expenses and budget allocation might have been completely missed by media, if not for Escudero’s disclosure. Although public documents were available for scrutiny, the media failed to seek out the data that could have given the public the information it needs to evaluate the value to the country of Mrs. Arroyo’s travels.

There is also a common tendency in the media to report without question or investigation the statements of officials. For the most part, the media relied on the statements of Malacañang authorities for information on Mrs. Arroyo’s travels.

Journalists need a healthy dose of skepticism, and the activities of national government especially should not be exempt from the same scrutiny. The reality of the Philippine political arena is that, to put it politely, those in power tend to cover, embellish, and deodorize what they and their allies do.

The right questions

What benefit did the country gain from Mrs. Arroyo’s trips? The most frequent answers, based on media reports, were foreign aid, investments and job creation. During the Japan-Los Angeles-Colombia-Brazil-Dubai-Hong Kong excursion from June 17 to June 27, *TV Patrol* and *24 Oras* reported Mrs. Arroyo’s supposed agenda in the Middle East: to generate jobs and additional income for Filipino overseas workers. In print as well as broadcast, reporting on the president’s activities in other countries was so superficial to the point of irrelevance.

Arroyo also made an unscheduled stopover in Recife, Colombia, an offshore banking haven like Switzerland. These unscheduled trips are not unusual for the First Couple. The most infamous was that to Hainan, China where the couple allegedly witnessed the signing of the anomalous \$329-billion NBN-ZTE deal. Yet, the media failed to ask why Mrs. Arroyo made that unannounced visit to Colombia.

Thus far, the trip that has received the most coverage was Arroyo’s July trip to meet US Pres. Barack Obama. That meeting was the headline in the national dailies, which cited as a major outcome the appointment of the Philippines as chief coordinator for the US in the Alliance of South East Asian Nations. What the demands of the designation were, or whether such a designation actually existed and since when, the media failed to ask.

Everything the Philippine head of state does abroad is in fact fair game for the media. Mrs. Arroyo and retinue’s \$20,000 dinner at Le Cirque and \$15,000 dinner at Bobby Van’s Steakhouse are thus legitimate news report subjects. Although the Philippine media were dependent on foreign media for information on these meals, local reports were on the mark as they pointed to the disparity between the president’s penchant for ostentation and the national reality in which between two to 3.7 million families regularly experience hunger.

During the “pre-war years, the junkets were condemned in the press as too large but those pale in comparison to the present”, stated an *Inquirer* editorial. (“Most Useless Junket,” June 21, 2008). Indeed, new accounts on profligacy have been written in Arroyo’s term.

But while the media are the supposed watchdogs of government, they have failed to inspire the public to demand accountability of the Palace. ■

COUNTRIES VISITED BY GLORIA ARROYO

NO. OF TIMES VISITED

United States	10
China	7
Japan	7
Malaysia	6
Brunei	4
Bahrain	3
Hong Kong	3
Italy	3
Mexico	2
Thailand	2
United Kingdom	2
Australia	1
Brazil	1
Cambodia	1
Chile	1
Colombia	1
Dubai	1
Egypt	1
France	1
India	1
Indonesia	1
Kuwait	1
Macau	1
New Zealand	1
Peru	1
Qatar	1
Russia	1
Saudi Arabia	1
Singapore	1
Spain	1
Switzerland	1
Syria	1
United Arab Emirates	1
Vatican City	1

Reference: Maui Hermitario (July 31, 2009). The Jetsetting President. <http://www.thepoc.net/index.php/Politi-Ko/Politiko-Features/The-jet-setting-president-Part-1-of-2.html>. Accessed August 14.

■ By Melinda Quintos de Jesus

HEAVY RAINS fell in the early morning of June 25 as “Feria” continued to blow its strength through Southern Luzon. For many years past, I had set that date on the calendar for the holding of the Jaime V. Ongpin Awards for Excellence in Journalism (JVOAEJ). It simplified planning from year to year. June was the birthday month of the man the program honors.

In organizing a public event, there is no way to predict the weather. Doing everything indoors saves a bit on the worry. But attendance that will fill up the SGV Hall, our usual venue in the AIM Conference Center, also comes with good weather.

I had long ceased to be nervous about holding the program. The staff had taken over the worrying over details and had grown very good at making sure we had everything and everyone in place. But that morning, I felt a twinge of panic. This program was a milestone. A small audience would put a damper on the celebration. There is no way anyone can cover up an empty hall.

The early comers trickled in slowly. By 9:30, which our invitation and printed program set as the hour to begin, there were only around twenty people in the hall, apart from the staff. At 9:45, only three tables were filled. Members of the media are notorious late-comers. Most years we have had to wait for enough of the journalists to stagger in for their places on the panel. This year, five out the six panelists were on time. But we could not begin with such a small audience. I made the decision to wait and announced we would start in ten minutes. The room was half-filled when we started at 10:00 AM. In the next half-hour, most of the tables were taken and when we ended the seminar, we had the usual full house to hear and cheer the announcement of the winners of 2008.

Loyal following of schools

Through the years, the Jaime V. Ongpin Journalism Seminar Program had won the loyalty of faculty and students from universities and colleges in and around Metro Manila. Since 1995 when The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) first opened the seminar to this com-

After 20 Years, A Recess for the JVOAEJ

The Awards have helped encourage the growth of investigative journalism, but it's time for a reassessment



munity, teachers have called in as soon as they received their invitations to make their reservations for their class. In one year when the budget allowed it, the program had over 700 guests and crowd management was a problem.

This seminar, which is the first part of the morning's program, had served as an outreach activity, linking the practice to the principle taught in classrooms, connecting those working in the newsrooms with those who might one day join them in the field.

The panel discussion engaged selected finalists in a moderated conversation and they talked

about how they decided on the subject of their competing article, the problems they encountered in writing the story, the different instruments of research and investigation which expanded their search for data and information. Did editors help them through their difficulties? Some did. These were given assignments. But often enough, the reporters were working solo. In the course of this exchange, the working journalists introduce the students to the real life of journalism, moving their understanding from text books to actual tasks, show-

ing them how the job is done.

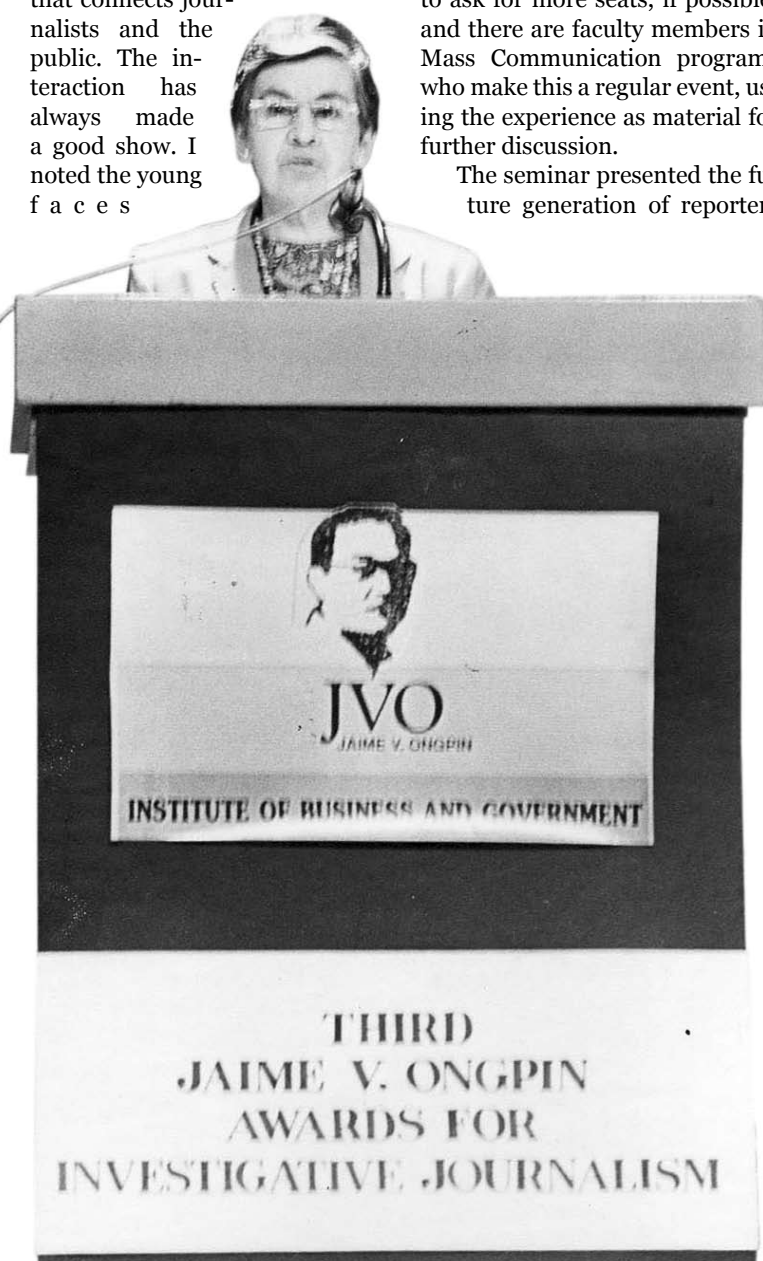
An open forum allows for interaction with students or others in the audience. Favorite questions: Have you received death threats? Have you been offered bribes? The seminar has made the awards program a unique event that connects journalists and the public. The interaction has always made a good show. I noted the young faces

fixed on the personalities on stage. Some students attend because their teacher decides it is how they will have a class for that day. But most everyone who attends finds the close view of members of the press a memorable learning experience. Some teachers call to ask for more seats, if possible; and there are faculty members in Mass Communication programs who make this a regular event, using the experience as material for further discussion.

The seminar presented the future generation of reporters



1995 Awards



Maribel Ongpin, widow of Jaime and board member of the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility

CMFR FILE

in touch with the “best and the brightest” in the field, showing them role models who are not on camera or made celebrities because of their exposure on radio or television. These are the unsung, unknown “heroes” who work behind the scenes. The names may be known to some, but only if they still read newspapers. But listening to them talk about their work, the student gets the feel of the challenge and sees the world of journalism beyond the textbook. Fritz Dacpano, who attended the seminar as a student of the Manila Times School of Journalism became a third-prize winner in 2006. She said, the working journalists in the panel she attended inspired her.

A small and quiet ceremony

The program was initially designed as a small and quiet ceremony, “short and sweet” as I would say to describe it. As a living memorial for the late Jaime V. Ongpin, the awards were first given in the evening with a program that followed a cocktail reception. We did invite the press, but we really counted on the friends and family of Jimmy and Maribel Ongpin and the friends and some family members of the journalists who were named as finalists. The chairman of the board of judges, among them, then Chief Justice Andres Narvasa, Teodoro Benigno, and Dean Feliciano, would say a few words about the selection process. Brief remarks from a friend, usually a trustee of the now defunct Jaime V. Ongpin Institute of Business and Government, concluded the program with the representation of the awards’ main sponsor for the first 10 years.

After operating as an NGO which tried to establish programs for government and business sector interaction, The JVOIBG turned over the program to the Ateneo de Manila University. The ADMU continues to support the awards with a fund to sustain the institutional expenses required to run the program. But for almost 10 years as the program grew, CMFR has had to raise a greater amount of the money for program costs.

As the program grew, a large audience followed the seminar. The program also attracted the attention of the Canadian Embassy and in 1997, the JVO awards announced the first Marshall McLuhan Prize, a travel study tour of Canada arranged by the embassy for the top winner of the first prize. In 2003, the first Australian Ambassador’s Award, a travel grant to Australia, was added to the winnings of the winner of the explanatory category.



Che-Che Lazaro emcees the Awards

A unique selection process

The JVO takes more time than other awards programs. An autonomous scan started a three tier process of judging, a gathering of articles based on minimum requirements of length and publication. When the numbers of articles increased, CMFR recruited a team of journalism majors from the University of the Philippines who would do this starting in October. A screening committee takes over and selects what it thinks can be considered for final selection. A Board of Judges takes over to rank the finalists for first, second, and third prizes. The process is completed only sometime in early May.

In short, the selection does not depend on self-nomination or submission by journalists.

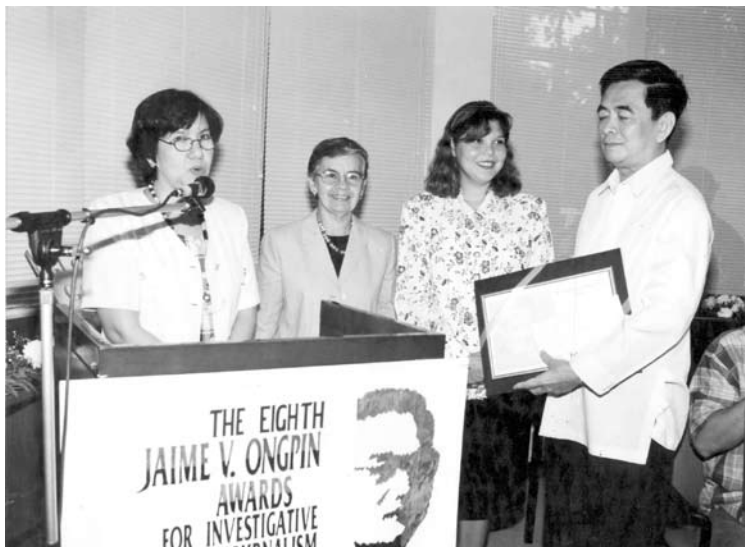
While the independent selection takes more time and money, it has also given the awards an unusual patina of honor because it does not involve self-presentation.

I did not discount the validity of the process of self-nomination. The Pulitzer Prize involves the submission of articles by news organizations and is no less honorable for this. CMFR has made it a practice to send out letters inviting publishers and editors to nominate the articles they think should be considered for the JVO awards, partly to engage them as well as to assure as complete a

WINNERS ALL



2003 Awards



1997

scanning as possible. In the Philippines, however, deadlines for submission are problematic for a community that works by the deadline. And having to deal with late submissions creates its own nightmares for the staff who have to check these against the scan results. This invitation to nominate has received negative reactions from some members of the press, who expressed their distaste for the act of self-nomination.

A costly process

The costs added up, including six months of staff personnel,

providing part and full time work to the running of the program, organizing the systems for scanning, screening and judges’ meetings, and holding the event itself. Without other institutional overhead expenses, these costs amounted to an estimated P1.4 million.

The program involved a continuing search for funding. CMFR has been favored by several funders with commitments for two-year support. These include the Ford Foundation in 2001-2003, the Asia Foundation in 2004-2007, the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs Government of Norway in 2007, and for the last two years, the Open Society Institute. There was one year when CMFR gave away almost one million pesos in award money.

The financial crisis forced all funders to review the objectives of their support. The global financial crunch has not spared the JVOAEJ.

Why a recess?

After 20, perhaps, we in CMFR also needed to re-examine what has served as one of the Center’s three flagship programs and its objectives. The program has balanced the critique of the media monitor. It has justified the continuing protection and promotion

of press freedom in the Philippines by showing what good journalism can do as a “watchdog” of those in power. It has given the incentive for journalists to take the time from the daily grind and undertake painstaking examination and investigation that leads to greater public scrutiny of the conduct of those holding public office. In-depth reports, explanatory or investigative, also help the public understand the issues and controversies reflected in current events.

After 20 years, more space is given to articles that break away from the routine of regular beats, from the recording of official statements, from the churning of “he-said, she-said” reports, from the deadly sameness of accounts of incidents, accidents, calamities that make it as news in many newspapers. From some 50 articles found by the scan in the early nineties, there are now over a thousand reviewed by the screeners who pass on over 100 articles to the board of judges for final selection.

So there is more grist for the mill. What about the quality of the grain?

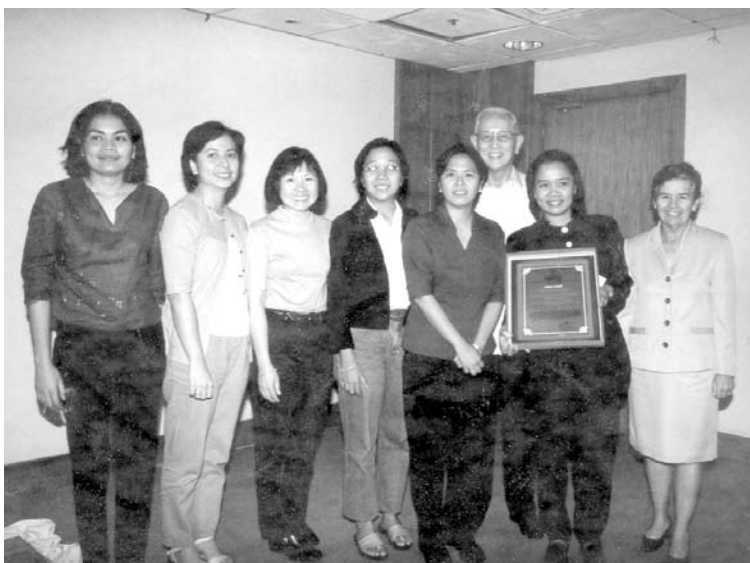
Clearly, the increase in quantity of in-depth reports in itself indicates a significant shift in the journalistic scope, with journalists breaking through the surface of the news, and moving the task of reporting beyond the answers to basic questions of who, the what and the where of events, to examine the how and why of developments.

The quality of output as shown by the winning articles shows off the skills for tracking complex issues, isolating the crucially relevant facts that make up a pattern of corruption or identifying the missing link or the “smoking gun”. Tracing documentary evidence and validating testimony are not the only journalistic tasks. One must also weave a compelling story. The yield of winning stories is impressive in demonstrating the talent and dedication of Filipino journalists. But those producing these consistently outstanding reports remain a small and exclusive circle. To make room for others to compete and be recognized, CMFR elevated frequent winners to a “Hall of Fame” which cuts them out from further competition.

The awards program cannot in itself raise standards of practice. Only the best news rooms can do this. Editorial guidance and mentoring remain the all-important aspects in the production of world class journalism. Cash awards and the prestige of the prize can only do so much. The culture of excellence can only be developed from



1999



2001 winners

within the practice as it is nurtured ultimately by the readers and users of the news. In that sense, the JVO Awards are probably a bit ahead of the times. We had hoped to prod editors and newspaper owners to agree to invest in the process, commit resources for the research and the time-consuming editorial supervision that in-depth reports require.

After some years of reading award-winning articles for the Ongpin prize, Luis V. Teodoro, a senior journalist who served two terms as dean of the UP College of Mass Communication, noted certain gaps in the craft of reporting. "There's no question that many practitioners have the form down pat. But only a few articles can rank with those written by, same, *New Yorker* writers. The craft part needs attention, too."

Other lessons learned

The experience of the program has sharpened the impression of a fractious press community, divided by ideological and political lines as well as opposing professional values. Sometimes, institutional and individual hostilities break down the esprit d'corps of those holding shared ideas and ideals.

Perhaps, because of the relatively small market for news products, the sense of rivalry and competition more easily dominates and overcomes the impulse to celebrate the triumph of one's peers. I must admit to the disappointment of announcing an award and have no one representing the person or the news organization to accept the honor. Few editors and publishers have graced the program when their articles are not competitive.

The program has received only the most perfunctory coverage from newspapers, unless someone in the organization has been cited. The story about the best stories in Philippine journalism has

simply not been ranked as newsworthy. Television has given more attention to the achievements of those working in print, than those in the print media.

Making news of journalism awards reflects the value given to the recognition of excellence and the need to keep striving for it. I wonder then if this "snubbing" of the awards reflects some fundamental flaw that is shared by the press with the rest of Philippine society.

It would be different, I guess, if the awards organizer was an association of news organizations or journalists. But a previous officer of a funding organization which had supported the awards organized by the national association of editors and publishers, the Philippine Press Institute (PPI), had noted the same scant attention given by other newspapers to the winners from the community press. I concluded he was expecting some interest in Metro Manila newspapers.

Recess-ing the program

In the end, the recess is imposed by the difficulty of sourcing a continuing fund. Without some kind of long-term commitment, funding is difficult to do from year to year because the cycle of the program activities needs to begin at a certain time or it cannot happen. Funding priorities have not included incentives and awards for working journalists. And in the larger scheme of things and given the range of challenges of media development in general, this is perfectly understandable.

But it is a recess, not an end. It is important to celebrate achievements. It is important to encourage journalists to take on the more difficult assignments and to accept the challenge of "digging out the truth".

But for now, I am perfectly at peace with the decision to give this program a rest. ■



20th JVOAEJ WINNERS ANNOUNCED

THE PHILIPPINE Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) and VERA Files won the top prizes in the 20th Jaime V. Ongpin Awards for Excellence in Journalism (JVOAEJ) for works published in 2008.

The results of the competition were announced during the annual JVOAEJ ceremonies at the AIM Conference Center Manila on June 25. The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) has been the administrative and technical secretariat of the JVOAEJ since 1990.

The JVOAEJ scanned the print media for investigative and explanatory articles published in 2008, and then focused on the urgent issues of governance and corruption, human rights, and the environment to encourage reporting on these urgent issues. This year a fourth theme was added: the financial and economic crisis.

"Aid inflow sparks scandals for GMA, debt woes for RP" by Roel Landingin of the PCIJ (published in *BusinessWorld* and *The Philippine Star* on February 11-13, 2008 and in *Malaya* on February 11-14, 2008) and the VERA Files article "Quedancor swine program another fertilizer scam" by Dios Labiste, Luz Rimban and Yvonne Chua (published in the *BusinessMirror* on September 2 and 4, 2008, *Malaya* and *The Manila Times* on September 1-3, 2008 and *Philippines Graphic* on September 15, 22 and 29, 2008) were judged the best reports of 2008. Each received a plaque of distinction and a cash prize of P70,000. Roel Landingin was also a top prize winner in last year's JVOAEJ and was the winner

of the Australian Ambassador's Award.

The following articles each won a plaque of merit and a cash prize of P25,000:

- A Policy of Betrayal
By Miriam Grace Go
abs-cbnNEWS.com/News-break
Published in *The Philippine Star* on March 15-17, 2008
- Squatters and the City
By Cherry Ann T. Lim and Rene H. Martel
Editor: Cherry Ann T. Lim
Sun.Star Cebu
August 11-14, 2008
- Less Than 10 People in Plot; 5 Core, 5 Others 'In the Know'
By Fe Zamora
Philippine Daily Inquirer
August 21-27, 2008

The Embassy of Canada announced that the Marshall McLuhan Prize, a travel study tour of Canada, will go to Dios Labiste. This is the 13th year that the Embassy of Canada has awarded the Marshall McLuhan Prize in the JVOAEJ.

The first JVOAEJ was launched in 1990 to honor the late Jaime V. Ongpin who was secretary of finance during the Aquino administration. A press freedom advocate, Ongpin was involved in the struggle against the Marcos dictatorship and was instrumental in harnessing public support for the restoration of democracy.

The JVOAEJ this year was sponsored by the Open Society Foundation Media Program and Ateneo de Manila University.

The finalists in this year's JVOAEJ awards were:

- Political Killings not Official but an Unintended Policy'
By Nikko Dizon, Jocelyn R. Uy and Leila B. Salaverria
Editor: Fernando del Mundo
Philippine Daily Inquirer
May 9-12, 2008
- US Subprime Crisis: Why We Should Worry
By Des Ferriols
The Philippine Star
October 11-14, 2008
- The Many Faces of Bribery
By Aries Rufo
abs-cbnNEWS.com/News-break
Published in *The Philippine Star* on September 11-13, 2008

All the finalists received a plaque and a cash prize of P10,000.

This year, the JVOAEJ also gave out two plaques of special mention to the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* for "The NBN-ZTE controversy report" published on January 30-31, February 8 and 11, May 14 and November 23, 2008 and *Newsbreak* for "The big dig" published July/September 2008. ■



A DEATH LIKE NO OTHER

From page 1

only showed opposition to Charter Change but disapproval as well of Arroyo.

News and photos of Aquino in life as well as in death packed the newspaper pages, while the broadcast press aired countless reports and specials about her. The electronic press also devoted microsites and running accounts related to Aquino's passing last Aug. 1, and bloggers outdid each other in their grief.

In a mirror of public sentiment, most of the media organizations paid tribute and expressed their gratitude to Aquino, who not only helped restore democratic institutions and freedoms after the ouster

The press mirrored public sentiment by paying tribute and expressing gratitude to Aquino



of the Marcos dictatorship through People Power 1 in 1986, but also continued to oppose abuse of power and all attempts to curtail the hard-won freedoms the 1987 Constitution—one of her outstanding legacies—guarantees Filipinos.

In a show of unity with the Filipino people, the major news and media organizations adorned their pages or TV channel screens with yellow ribbons, and aired special coverage of the wake and funeral of the former president. For several days after her death, the front page of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*—itself a 1980s product of the anti-dictatorship resistance—had a yellow tint. ABS-CBN 2 also aired a special with several of its news anchors and reporters wearing yellow ribbons and saying a prayer for Aquino.

Her life and legacy

In print, *The Manila Times* provided in an Aug. 2 special a sketch of Aquino's life, including her struggles during the Marcos dictatorship, her presidency, and her political activities after her term ("The widow in yellow: *The life and times of Corazon Cojuangco Aquino*", p. B6-B7). The *Times* also included a list of her awards and achievements.

Timelines like those of *abs-cbn-NEWS.com/Newsbreak* ("Timeline: Events in the life of Cory Aquino, <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/features/07/21/09/timeline-events-life-cory-aquino>; http://newsbreak.com.ph/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6456&Itemid=88889476&ed=44; *The Philippine Star*, Aug. 2) and *GMANews*.



Two children of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, Maria Imelda "Imee" Marcos and Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., visit Aquino's wake.

TV ("Highlights of Cory Aquino's life", <http://blogs.gmanews.tv/coryaquino/2009/07/highlights-of-cory-aquino%E2%80%99s-life/>

#comments) provided the public useful snapshots of key events in Aquino's life.

The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) referred readers to an interview it did with Aquino on the 20th anniversary of People Power 1 in 2006. Aquino had discussed many issues, including her term as president. ("Corazon C. Aquino, 76: Democracy her Legacy", <http://www.pcij.org/blog/?p=3942>)

GMANews.TV posted a transcript of selected sound bites from one of Aquino's last full-length interviews. In an interview with Jessica Soho, she discussed her administration's record, her thoughts on Ninoy, and her medical condition. (<http://blogs.gmanews.tv/cory-aquino/archives/transcript-of-last-interview-with-cory-aquino>) The site also did a "livestream" coverage of the funeral procession and



allowed members of the social networking site Facebook to comment and interact with each other.

In an Aug. 4 report, GMA News Research enumerated the most significant decisions of the Aquino leadership including the pardon of political detainees, peace efforts with rebels, the search for the ill-gotten wealth of the Marcoses, the abolition of the death penalty, and the 1987 Constitution. ("Cory: bearer of democracy, peacemaker, compassionate leader", <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/168990/Cory-bearer-of-democracy-peacemaker-compassionate-leader>)

In its Aug. 3 banner, *BusinessWorld*, apart from providing general details surrounding Aquino's passing, focused on an aspect relatively underreported in other papers: the economic legacy of the Aquino administration ("A nation mourns"). Among the programs cited were the liberalization of foreign exchange, the build-operate-transfer law, the agrarian reform program, and wage policy reforms.

In his "No Free Lunch" column at the *Inquirer*, former socioeconomic planning secretary Cielito Habito argued that one major economic legacy of the Aquino administration was its implementation of "some of the most crucial but also the most unpopular reforms for the economy, to which we owe the much-extolled resilience of our economy today." ("Tita Cory's economic legacy" Aug. 10, p. B2) Habito served as deputy director-general of the National Economic Development Authority under Aquino.

BusinessMirror provided a historical perspective on, and an analysis of, Aquino's economic legacy. Aquino's ascension to the presidency resulted in the restoration of national and international confidence on the country's government and economy, according to contributor Val Araneta, a member of the Financial Executives Institute of the Philippines. ("An economic legacy from President Cory Aquino", Aug. 5 p. B8)

Differences and similarities

In addition to reporting on the details of the wake and funeral, some news anchors and reporters pointed out the seeming similarities between Cory Aquino's funeral and Ninoy's. The similarities, they noted, included the high number—in the tens of thousands of onlookers and mourners, the routes taken in both processions, the dominance of the color yellow among the men, women and even children who paid their last respects to the former president in the various venues available including the streets, the rain of confetti along the route transferring her remains from La Salle Greenhills to the Manila Cathedral and the funeral procession



Aquino's death: Round-the-clock coverage

Photos by LITO OCAMPO



Reporters flock to Pinky Abellada, one of Aquino's daughters, for an interview.

from the Cathedral to the Manila Memorial Park, and the patriotic songs, among them the iconic *Bayan Ko*, sung in both events.

Only a few reported that despite these similarities, the two events differed on a number of major points. For example, a *24 Oras* reporter pointed out last Aug. 5 that although many people were in both events, the mood was angry during Ninoy's time. The people who lined the streets during Cory

Aquino's funeral procession, he added, were grieving while at the same time expressing their gratitude to "Tita" Cory for restoring Philippine democratic institutions, and resisting efforts to restore authoritarian rule.

As the press reported the Aquino family's preference for a private rather than state funeral for the former president, TV5's *TEN* last Aug. 3 explained to viewers the difference between a state funeral and a private one. Aquino was the first president to decline a state funeral, *TEN* added, while Ferdinand Marcos—whose remains are currently inside a refrigerated crypt in his hometown province of Ilocos Norte—is still awaiting one. GMA News Research discussed the protocols observed when a former president dies. ("Protocols observed when a Philippine president passes away", <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/168802/Protocols-observed-when-a-Philippine-president-passes-away>)

Tributes and personal accounts

Among the dozens of tributes and personal accounts about Aquino were those of journalists such as Sheila Coronel, Malou Mangahas, David Celdran, Chit Estella, and Melinda Quintos de Jesus. ■



LAPSES

FOR ALL its thoroughness, some lapses in the coverage of Aquino's death did occur. One major lapse was the media's mix-up of the names Aquino and Arroyo. A number of reports said Arroyo for Aquino, as in "the remains of President Arroyo will be open to public viewing tomorrow."

Some print and broadcast reports were actually caught saying it was Arroyo who had died, not Aquino. One egregious example: the *Manila Bulletin's* Aug. 5 caption for a photo of Aquino's coffin: "WITH UTMOST CARE. Military honor guard carefully moves the coffin of President Arroyo out of the Manila Cathedral." Aside from the fact that there were at least eight police officers, not soldiers, carrying the coffin, the coffin was, of course, Aquino's and not Arroyo's.

Newsbreak also committed a similar booboo, when it referred to "Aquino" as "Arroyo" several times. The writer, Lala Rimando, later apologized. "I'm guilty. I killed our president. I wrote an online story about the passing of a former president but inadvertently referred to the current one who's still very much alive in portions of the story." The apology, however, did go on and on and didn't seem to know where a seemingly professional recognition of responsibility ends and plain self-indulgence begins.

The *Inquirer* showed how it's done. Correcting its Aug. 11 banner, it wrote Aug. 13: "In the Aug. 11 issue, the front-page banner story—'Palace won't say sorry'—carried an erroneous sentence: 'Had Ms Aquino wanted a simple dinner, she should have chosen a simple restaurant, Cruz added.' Archbishop Oscar Cruz was referring to President Macapagal-Arroyo—not the late former President Cory Aquino." End of correction.

Several media gaffes involved plagiarism. *Philippines Graphic* magazine apologized for a timeline on Aquino's illness, death and funeral which turned out to have been lifted from abs-cbnNEWS.com but which its August 10-16 issue did not acknowledge. Freelancer Angela Stuart Santiago has accused ABS-CBN 2 anchor Karen Davila of making free use—again without acknowledgement—of segments from her book *Himagsikan sa EDSA* (Revolt at EDSA, 2000) in the ABS-CBN special "Laban ni Cory" (Cory's Fight). Ironically, a third case involves abs-cbnNEWS.com. A comprehensive, four-part report by the website on Aquino's life and times (<http://coryaquino.abs-cbnnews.com>) turned out to have been lifted, without any acknowledgment, from Corazon Aquino's official website (<http://www.coryaquino.ph>).

Most of the news and public affairs programs, meanwhile, failed to consult less predictable human sources to beef up their coverage. They could have interviewed former Aquino officials to discuss her term and legacy as president as well as their difficulties in running a government after two decades of dictatorship. Instead, the programs interviewed the standard sources—members of her fam-



ily, particularly TV ratings-draw Kris, supporters, government officials, and the usual pundits whose voices and faces the networks mercilessly inflicted on viewers for hours on end—on their thoughts about Aquino.

Some TV reports merely described the Marcoses and Aquinos as political rivals. However, many Filipinos, including the Aquino family, believe that the Marcoses and their allies were behind Ninoy's assassination in 1983, which makes the relationship between the two families more than one of "rivalry". Apparently, a reviewing of more recent history—meaning from the 1970s onwards—was needed, but wasn't forthcoming.

Coverage a la martial law

But fuzzy historical memory alone can't account for the gross inadequacies of government TV reporting.

Aquino's passing and the events subsequent to it, such as the huge crowds in the streets during the transfer of her remains to the Manila Cathedral, were the biggest stories in the first week of August. But government-run NBN-4 didn't seem to notice or care, prompting the *Inquirer* to correctly observe that the government media's attitude was reminiscent of martial law. NBN's coverage holds true to form in the government stations' practice to cover only what's favorable to the incumbent administration. While the major networks were covering live the progress of the Aquino cortege to the Manila Cathedral on Aug. 3, NBN was airing, among others, a musical program and a public affairs program replaying President Macapagal Arroyo's July 27 State of the Nation Address.

Last Aug. 3, *Express Balita* did report something related: that Aquino supported the presidents who succeeded her. It then showed Aquino with Arroyo when they were still political allies. *Express Balita*, a government-controlled station, conveniently failed to mention that since 2005, Aquino had been a fierce Arroyo critic following the "Hello, Garci" election cheating scandal. ■



REACTIVE REPORTING Clueless and harmful

Only a few reports, commentaries and interviews tried to look more deeply into the Roxas issue

■ By Hector Bryant L. Macale

THE RETURN to the Philippines of Filipina-American activist Melissa Roxas last July made the headlines. But the reports on her alleged abduction and torture (along with two other companions) by military agents were mostly limited to he-said, she-said accounts. What was worse, however, was the failure of the press to educate the public on human rights, some media organizations' providing airtime to the most primitive allegations, and even making it seem that the victims' anger towards their tormentors was unjustified.

According to Roxas—a member of the US chapter of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan)—armed men abducted her and two other companions, Juanito Carabeo and John Edward Jandoc, last May 19 in Tarlac. For six days, she claimed, her abductors tortured her into admitting that she is a member of the New People's Army (NPA), the armed group of the Communist Party of the Philippines-National Democratic Front (CPP-NDF).

Save for a few news stories and commentaries, most of the reports on the issue chose to focus on the extremist views of partylist representatives Jovito Palparan (an ex-army general accused of gross human rights violations) and Pastor Alcover, and their claim that Roxas was an NPA member. Palparan is the Bantay Party-list Reps. while Alcover is with the Alliance for Nationalism and Democracy.

Some reports did quote other personalities such as Commission on Human Rights Chair Leila de Lima who tried to present the Palparan and Alcover claims in a different light. De Lima told the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*: "(F)reedom from torture is a non-derogable human right. Under no circumstance, not even (in) a state of war or conflict, can the torture of anyone be justified."

Of all social institutions the

press should be the first to be aware of how individuals and institutions manipulate the media to suit their agenda. Not only should a great deal of skepticism equip the press when reporting complex issues such as human rights, to avoid being manipulated it also needs to be pro-active in getting information.

It can begin by asking the right questions. For example, a July 28 *Inquirer* report quoted Military Spokesperson Lt. Col. Romeo Brawner Jr. as saying that the video clip Palparan and Alcover said showed Roxas in an NPA camp was "authentic" and that the military had found out "that it was Roxas on the video." (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, "Video of Fil-Am at NPA camp authentic—AFP")

Assuming it was indeed Roxas in the video, did her being in the same camp as NPA guerillas justify her abduction and torture? That it did not was not part of the information the report provided. And yet the Constitution and the civilized world ban torture, no matter what the claimed offense of anyone is, even if that offense be rebellion.

The government-run networks were much worse in their reportage. NBN-4's *Teledyaryo* usually relied solely on military and government sources, and it did not make any exception in this case. The views of Roxas and her organization, as

well as those of other personalities such as De Lima, it mentioned only in passing, if at all.

Clueless

Some reports were completely clueless as to the implications of the military's claims. The GMA-7 news program *Saksi* last July 29 reported the first day of investigation at the CHR. Its reporter said that even other observers could not hide their antipathy towards Palparan. The report then showed a clip of torture victim Raymund Manalo cursing Palparan. *Saksi* identified Manalo as a "torture survivor", but provided no other detail on Manalo, or even such background information as why activists call Palparan the "Butcher" and accuse him of human rights violations.

Reporting on the same incident, TV5's *TEN* reported: "*Sa kainitan ng diskusyon, umeksena pa ang isang hindi inaasahang bisita*," referring to Manalo. Not only did *TEN* not identify him, the

report's tone was also disparaging of the victims of human rights violations.

Manalo and his brother, both farmers in Bulacan, were in this category of victims. They were abducted by alleged military agents in Feb. 2006. The two were in captivity for more than a year but escaped on Aug. 2007.

Express Balita last July 29 reported that the military was investigating claims that Roxas is a "communist"—without mention-

Assuming it was indeed Roxas in the video, did her being in the same camp as NPA guerillas justify her abduction and torture?

.....



Rep. Satur Ocampo, Roxas' lawyer Rex Fernandez, and Melissa Roxas

Photos by LITO OCAMPO

ing that membership in the Communist Party is no longer illegal in this country, and that membership in any organization whether legal or illegal does not justify abduction and torture.

How to explain the press' reluctance to provide the information that could have put the issue in the right perspective? Part of the reason could have been limited understanding of what's allowed and what's not, and part of it could be fear. But ideological bias—it's okay to torture and murder communists—was also likely to have played a major part in the press failure to confront the issue head-on.

A handful

As a result, only a few reports, commentaries, and interviews tried to look more deeply into the Roxas issue.

The online news site *Bulatlat* had the most pro-active and perceptive coverage. It devoted frequent reports and features on the controversy. One *Bulatlat* in-depth story the rest of the press should have done was its analysis of the use of the "NPA" label to justify Roxas's abduction and torture.

The Philippines is a signatory to a number of international protocols against torture and human-rights abuses," *Bulatlat* wrote.

"This emphasis on freedom from torture as a non-derogable right is particularly significant because the state's justification of the use of torture—in the case of Roxas, by alleging that she was a guerrilla—undermines whatever commitment it has assured the international community that it respects human rights." ("Justifying Torture of Melissa Roxas, Regime Violates International Agreements," Aug. 12, <http://www.bulatlat.com/main/2009/08/12/by-justifying-torture-of-melissa-roxas-regime-violates-international-agreements-it-signed/>) ■



The press then and now A CHILLING COMPARISON

The hostile environment the Arroyo administration has created is unprecedented since the Marcos period

■ By Danilo Araña Arao

THE GHOST of the political past has risen in the present. The specter of things to come is manifest in parallelisms with the things that were. Fourteen years of martial law rule in the Philippines prompt concerned Filipinos to periodically remind their fellow citizens of the dictatorial tendencies of those who assumed power after the ouster of the late Ferdinand Marcos in 1986.

Putting the country in a state of national emergency through Presidential Proclamation (PP) No. 1017 in Feb. 2006 was the closest the country has so far come to the reimposition of martial law, even if PP 1017 was in effect for only a week. Ironically it happened as the nation was marking the 20th anniversary of the ouster of Marcos through EDSA 1 in 1986, and that it was imposed by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, a beneficiary of EDSA 2, which ousted former president Joseph Estrada in 2001 and put Arroyo in Malacañang.

Arroyo is herself under threat of ouster for the same reasons that Marcos and Estrada earned the people's ire—for human rights violations, electoral fraud, cronyism and corruption, among others. The June 19 to 22 survey of Social Weather Stations (SWS) showed that her satisfaction rating is at -31%. The SWS added that 70% of respondents oppose changing the Constitution to allow Arroyo to remain as President beyond the expiration of her term in 2010.

"Saving" the republic

Marcos cited two main reasons for the declaration of Martial Law in Sept. 1972—to save the republic from communism and to create a new society. The Arroyo administration has raised the same communist bogey to justify the suppression of those who oppose it, whether from the political opposition, the mass movement, or the various Leftist formations from party list organizations to the Communist Party of the Philippines (CCP). "New politics" has also been promoted by the Arroyo administration in behalf of national development.

It was the "New Society" then, it's the "New Politics" now. Both are nothing but empty rhetoric, but what's significant is that the social change both regimes promise remain unrealized.

But Marcos and Arroyo have something more in common: they are two of the most unpopular presidents the country has ever had. Understandable that most Filipinos have a sense of *déjà vu*



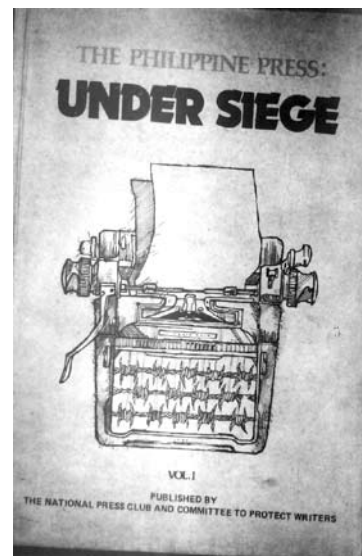
Photos and repros by LITO OCAMPO

in Marcos's justification for the declaration of Martial Law in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and circumstances that the Arroyo regime is orchestrating and taking advantage of today.

Calls for the ouster of Marcos preceded authoritarian rule. As in the case of Arroyo, Marcos was accused of corruption. Both were also said to be involved in various scandals in which they directly, their family members, or their close friends allegedly enriched themselves at the expense of the people.

A critical press

As far as the press and the media are concerned, the years leading to Martial Law had something in common with the present. In her book *The Manipulated Press*,



Rosalinda Pineda Ofreneo noted that in the early 1970s, "a large section of the Manila press sustained a strongly critical stance against the administration," citing as an example *The Manila Times'* opposition to Marcos, his policies and his actions "as early as the 1969 elections."

Ofreneo also points out that

the Lopez-owned *Manila Chronicle* (which used to be pro-Marcos because Fernando Lopez served as vice-president) became critical of the administration when the vice-president had a falling out with Marcos and resigned as secretary of Agriculture and Natural Resources in Jan. 1971.

Reminiscent of Arroyo's conflict with the Lopezes, Marcos had accused the latter of "fomenting unrest through their media." With regard to the magazine *Asia-Philippines Leader* established in the 1970s, Ofreneo suggested that it had a political agenda, since Joselito Jacinto was its publisher, and he happened to be the "scion of the wealthy (Jacinto) clan embroiled in a bitter battle with Marcos over the Iligan Integrated Steel Mills."





Intra-elite conflicts—plus

Such anecdotal evidence shows that the press' opposition to the Marcoses was expressive of conflicts within various wings of the economic and political elite. But that does not mean that the opposition was solely limited to the defense of their narrow interests.

Campus publications like *Lagablab* (Philippine Science High School), the *Philippine Collegian* (University of the Philippines-Diliman) and *Pandayan* (Ateneo de Manila University) had as editors and staff activists from their respective schools who consequently made these campus papers venues of dissent.

Other progressive organizations had their respective publications, as in the case of *Kabataang Makabayan* (*National Youth*), which published *Kalayaan* (which was also the name of the Katipunan's publication, the lone issue of which had called for the overthrow of Spanish rule in the country). Underground publications like *Ang Bayan* of the CPP were also publishing even before the imposition of Martial Law.

The Philippine press today maintains the same critical attitude towards the Arroyo administration. In its own assessment last July 24, the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication (UP CMC) said that the hostile environment the Arroyo administration has created is "unprecedented since the Marcos period," and that it "has undermined the constitutionally protected freedom of expression in general and press freedom in particular."

Just like the Marcos regime before the imposition of Martial Law, the current regime professes a commitment to press freedom that time and its actions have proven to be nothing but lip service.

"The imprisonment of Davao broadcaster Alex Adonis as a re-

The Philippine press today maintains the same critical attitude towards the Arroyo administration

sult of a libel case filed against him by the Speaker of the House of Representatives," said UP-CMC, "shows how government officials can use the law to silence and intimidate those who are critical of the powers-that-be. Broadcast journalist Cheche Lazaro was sued for wiretapping by a government official as a result of her work in exposing corruption. Journalists who went to Maguindanao were briefly detained when they covered the conflict there. All are the result of an atmosphere the Arroyo administration has created which encourages media repression."

Same tactics

The same situation was apparent in the pre-Martial Law era. According to Ofreneo, "the Marcos administration did not take the attacks (by the press) against it without hitting back." Marcos' tactics antedated those of Arroyo's husband Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo. In July 1971, Marcos filed a P50-million libel suit against *Time* magazine, a "warning to local publications which would continue to subject his office and his person to 'licentious assault.'" In addition, Sen. Benigno Aquino and the Manila Times Publishing Corporation faced a P5-million civil libel suit in Nov. 1971.

Just as today's concerned journalists and media groups



have organized themselves to fight back by, among others, filing cases against Mike Arroyo for the latter's libel cases against journalists and the Philippine National Police (PNP) and other government officials for the mass arrest of journalists covering the Manila

Peninsula siege in 2007.

Ofreneo observes that activist politics "entered the confines of the pre-1972 National Press Club (NPC) during the presidency of Antonio Zumel" who later on became chair of the underground National Democratic Front of the

Philippines (NDFP). The NPC also provided legal and moral assistance to activists arrested for publishing the *Dumaguete Times* which Ofreneo says was "the first socially aware newspaper...which felt a deep sense of compassion with the people suffering from social injustices."

Small comfort

The Marcos and Arroyo attitude towards the press are uncannily similar. Marcos, according to Ofreneo, believed that "the press had been infiltrated by the communists and attacked the 'media oligarchs' who had subjected him and his wife to 'scandalous abuse and slander' to topple down his administration."

As the UP CMC's statement said, Arroyo has also tagged critical media groups and at least one journalist "as enemies of the state either by the military's infamous 'Knowing the Enemy' presentation or its 2007 Order of Battle in Davao." In addition, Arroyo has used every opportunity to dismiss serious accusations against her and her allies as simply being the work of "destabilizers".

Today's political opposition has stressed time and again that the reimposition of martial law is a distinct possibility due to striking similarities in the social and political circumstances then and now, while the Arroyo administration always dismisses such claims as unfounded. But as those who have survived Martial Law would recall, Marcos too denied any plans to impose it, as well as to prolong his rule.

The bombings that have been happening in recent months are in this context convenient excuses for the declaration of Martial Law. The limitations provided by the 1987 Constitution on its imposition provide no comfort to people who are fully aware that the powers-that-be are planning to change the Constitution mainly to change the form of government and to lift term limits.

Notwithstanding occasional weaknesses in its coverage of issues, there is hope that today's press can live up to the challenge of at least making the public aware of the volatile political situation through its critical stance towards an administration hostile to press freedom and its determination to resist all forms of media repression. ■

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Analysis Impunity & witness protection

In a country of guns for hire and indifferent law enforcement, witnesses naturally expect safety from retribution



■ By Melanie Y. Pinlac

THE CONTINUING murder of Filipino journalists and media practitioners indicates how much the culture of impunity in the Philippines has flourished—one more result of the systemic weaknesses of the country's justice system. In addition to the government's lack of political will, inefficient law enforcement, prosecutors burdened with impossible case loads, the primitive state of forensic investigation, and the poorly-funded witness protection program are responsible for the culture of impunity.

The prosecution of criminal cases including media murders in the Philippines relies heavily, sometimes solely, on testimonial evidence rather than forensic evidence, the result of the rudimentary—and sometimes careless—processing and gathering of physical evidence by law enforcement agencies. Investigators, prosecutors and lawyers try to gather extensive and comprehensive testimonial evidence to make up for the lack of physical evidence, and their unreliability, if available. The families and colleagues of slain journalists have also been burdened with the task of locating possible witnesses for the prosecution of the suspected killers and masterminds.

In the murder case against the alleged killer of Davao-based broadcaster Fernando “Batman” Lintuan, the testimony of the lone witness, described by the court judge as “ridiculous and unbelievable”, contributed most to

the dismissal of the case and the acquittal of the suspect last April 22. The prosecution had failed to present additional evidence to corroborate the testimony of its lone witness.

On Christmas eve almost two years ago (Dec. 24, 2007), Lintuan—a radio blocktimer based in Davao City—was shot to death by a lone assassin.

What happened in the Lintuan case was not unusual. Many other media murder cases, like the 2003 killing of another Davao City broadcaster, Juan “Jun” Pala, never even reached the courts because no witness dared to come forward.

Securing witnesses

Convincing witnesses to testify in court—especially in cases involving powerful personalities—is itself as problematic as finding them.

In a country of guns for hire and indifferent law enforcement,



witnesses naturally demand assurance that they and their families will be safe from retribution. Many witnesses also worry about their socio-economic situation—the loss of their jobs, their relocation, problems with daily finances, among others (especially for those who will be admitted to safe houses).

Many witnesses can't be blamed if they think twice about going into the tedious trial process. In the Philippines, murder trials last for years. In some cases, witnesses have died without testifying. Those who do survive end up totally spent.

All these concerns about the protection of and support for witnesses and their families should have been addressed by Republic Act No. 6981, also known as the “The Witness Protection, Security and Benefit Act”. RA 6981,

Many witnesses can't be blamed if they think twice about going into the tedious trial process

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passed in 1991, mandates the creation of the government's Witness Benefits, Security and Protection Program, commonly known as the Witness Protection Program (WPP).

But in reality, the government witness protection scheme is limited in scope and poorly-funded. WPP Director and Senior State Prosecutor Leo Dacera III in his

report on the weaknesses and limitations of the state-run WPP pointed out that support for the prosecution services especially in the field of protecting witnesses has declined over the years despite an increase in the number of murder cases. (*The full report was published in CMFR's 2008 Philippine Press Freedom Report.*)

“Although we recognize that in a developing country like ours the Witness Protection Program and the prosecution service will always have to stand in line for scarce resources which must first be devoted for our people's basic needs, the issue should be properly addressed soonest before we reach the point where the problems become so huge and so many they compromise the capacity of the system where prosecution of the cases of slain journalists becomes nearly impossible,” Dacera said.

Not all witnesses are qualified for the government's witness protection program. RA 6981 states that, “Any person who has witnessed or has knowledge or information on the commission of a crime and has testified or is testifying or about to testify before any judicial or quasi-judicial body or before any investigating authority, may be admitted.” provided that he/she passed the criteria laid out by Section 3. The criteria are: (1) the case the witness will testify for is considered a “grave felony” as defined in the Revised Penal Code; (2) his/her testimony “can



be substantially corroborated in its material points"; (3) s/he and his/her family are under threat; and (4) s/he is not a law enforcement officer.

The government's inability to address the needs of witnesses has made some witnesses vulnerable to unwarranted influence or pressure. In 2008, two witnesses in the 2004 killing of Aklan-based broadcaster Herson Hinolan recanted. Both witnesses expressed in their affidavit of recantation uncertainty that the alleged gunman-mastermind was the one they saw shooting the broadcaster. One of these witnesses had allegedly been convinced by his relatives to withdraw his testimony in exchange for "help" from the defendant. The broadcaster's widow has since filed an administrative case against the state prosecutor who signed the witnesses' affidavits of recantation.

Many also doubt the capacity of the government's WPP to protect them.

It does not help that some witnesses have been killed as some cases were progressing. In 2005, Edgar Ongue, a key witness in the murder of Pagadian city-based journalist Edgar Damalerio—went into hiding after Edgar Amoro, another witness in the Damalerio killing, was himself killed. A gunman killed Amoro in Feb. 2005, allegedly for identifying former policeman Guillermo Wapile as the shooter of Damalerio. The Amoro family reported that he had been receiving death threats since May 2002 from Wapile and his accomplices. It took the intervention of the Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists (FFFJ) before the families of Damalerio, Ongue and Amoro could be moved to a secure location. (The Cebu City Regional Trial Court convicted Wapile on Nov. 25, 2005.)

Improving protection of witnesses

The inadequacies of the WPP have compelled witnesses in media killings to refuse to testify in

court. Media advocates and press groups have realized the importance of witnesses in the prosecution of cases and the urgent need to protect them and their families as well.

The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) and the Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists (FFFJ) regularly consult and talk with witnesses, families, and other relatives of slain journalists to reassure them of continuing support, morally, legally and financially. Established in 2003, the FFFJ is a coalition of six media organizations formed to address the continuing attacks against journalists and media practitioners. CMFR serves as the FFFJ Secretariat.

FFFJ has also expanded the coverage of its legal assistance to include key witnesses in ongoing cases against the killers of journalists and media practitioners. It has also worked closely with the prosecution teams handling media murder cases to address the problem of impunity.

Media organizations have offered monetary assistance for persons who choose to testify in cases involving the killing of their employees.

Press freedom advocates have also joined civil society organizations in pushing for a better budget for the WPP. In Dec. 2008, the Senate approved a P30-million increase in the proposed budget of the WPP. Sen. Richard Gordon, in a Dec. 2008 press release said that, "A well-funded protection program is an indispensable requirement for the successful resolution of heinous crimes, such as murder, kidnapping-for-ransom and drug trafficking."

Approved last March, the 2009 General Appropriations Act or RA 9524 reflect the senate proposal to increase the WPP budget by P30 million. For 2009, the fund reached P114 million, compared to the approximately P84 million it received the previous year. ■



Media Protection Center planned

A MEDIA Action Center to monitor attacks and threats against journalists and media practitioners is being planned by Northern Mindanao journalists with the Presidential Task Force Against Political Violence (popularly known as Task Force 211).

This was a result of the first "Seminar-Workshop on Ethical Standards, Personal Security & Protection of Media Practitioners" organized by Task Force 211. The seminar was held last June 19 in Cagayan de Oro City.

The seminar-workshop aimed to establish a system of "information gathering", an "alert system (to report threats and attacks against journalists to authorities and media groups)", a "feedback system", and other means to prevent the killing of journalists, Department of Justice Undersecretary and Task Force 211 Chair Ricardo Blancaflor said.

Stressing the importance of solving media murders, Blancaflor said that, "When you kill a Filipino media man (sic), you just don't kill an individual you also kill freedom of expression, which for most of us is more sacred than life." He added that "as long as we want to have a democracy we must have freedom of expression."

During the seminar, The Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP) Legal Counsel Rejie Jularbal discussed ethical and professional standards.



Jularbal said that broadcasters and journalists should be reminded of and be responsible for the possible effects of their reports.

Quoting a 1994 decision of the War Crimes Tribunal for Rwanda, Jularbal stressed the need for media responsibility:

"The power of broadcast media to create and destroy fundamental human values comes with great responsibility. Those who control such media are accountable for its consequences."

Police Colonel Andy Gauran talked about how media practitioners can safeguard themselves and avoid attacks when under threat. He reminded the press that ethical practice could also be an important form of protection as some threats are triggered by the reports of media practitioners.

The journalists and media practitioners also put together a manifesto affirming their adherence to ethical and professional standards and to the safety guidelines discussed during the seminar.

An ad hoc committee composed of representatives from local media organizations together with the Task Force 211 secretariat will oversee the creation of the Media Action Center. The Media Action Center will hold office at a local government building in Cagayan de Oro.

Representatives of the Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists, KBP officers, and members of the national directorate of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines were also present during the seminar-workshop. ■



The Power of the Image

The broadcast media's power is unprecedented and unchallenged

■ By Alaysa Tagumpay E. Escandor

THE WORLD of broadcasting only had words of praise for the late Walter Cronkite, the “father of TV journalism”, who died last July 17 (see Obit, page 27). Like many broadcast journalists in the United States in the 1950s, Cronkite made the transition from print to a medium that was then still in its natal years: television.

His characteristic baritone voice rose to fame along with the changing of the dynamics of the living room, where the TV set soon became the new centerpiece. In households across the US, families watched Cronkite deliver the news practically as it was happening.

“The medium is the message,” said media scholar Marshall McLuhan. And in the world of journalism, nowhere is the emphasis on form—and image—more pronounced than in the broadcast media. It is the power of the image that TV makes icons out of individuals, giving them the credibility that made Cronkite, for instance, “the most trusted man in America”.

The broadcast media are one of the most powerful forces in the public arena. The broadcast media's ability to make the ordinary charismatic; the ceremonial, credible; the nuanced, homogenous; and the far-away-familiar, is unprecedented and unchallenged.

Against this backdrop, however, is the undeniable and enduring obligation of the press to truth and public interest. This is the core principle journalists must abide by, and which society has a right to expect and demand. Lamentably, this right is barely exercised, much less recognized,

in the Philippines where media literacy is next to nil.

Beginnings of broadcast

Journalism is the method developed by society in providing information useful to itself, a reminder of how integral the press is to public life. Studies in sociology and anthropology show that the transmission and basic values of news have been remarkably consistent “throughout history and across cultures”, says historian Mitchell Stephens (*History of News: From the Drum to the Satellite*, 1988). After all, the drive for news, which in essence is the shared desire for knowledge on events both directly and indirectly experienced, is as old as time itself.

Nonetheless, there have been changes. The experience of news transmission and reception underwent a revolution of sorts in the early 1900s with the invention of radio, and with the provenance of TV.

For one, broadcast news has an ubiquity absent in print. The earliest radio services, for instance, reached areas in the peripheries, such as farming and fishing communities. Through TV, people witnessed from unfolding to climax the occurrences in far-flung areas as though they themselves



A television studio in campus

JOSEPH CATAAN

There is a need to review and enhance the learning process in broadcast journalism

were there firsthand. It is this very ability to project sound and image across continents that have spurred the development of global communication, which many sociologists mark as indispensable to the contemporary world.

The ubiquity of broadcast information has had an immense impact in the Philippines where a limited section of the population—84% in 2003—is functionally literate. An even smaller section can afford to buy newspapers, particularly national broadsheet dailies which are written in English instead of the national lan-

guage Filipino. It is no surprise, therefore, that broadcast media have become “the principal sources of news and the major venue for discussion of public affairs,” says Melinda Quintos de Jesus, executive director of the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (“Broadcasting: Information or Entertainment”, *Philippine Journalism Review*, Jan. 2004).

At present, over 96 percent of Filipinos have access to broadcast information, making it the convenient substitute for print. The bulk of the population turns to TV and radio for both news and entertainment. The problem begins when news is taken for entertainment, with sound and visuals aimed at diversion rather than explanation.

Dangers and demise

The rise of broadcast media is a revolution that has served as a supplement of, but is not necessarily limited to, the practice of journalism. Today, when the power of TV and radio has reached unparalleled heights, it is fitting to

ask just how well they have served public interest. Have the broadcast media managed to aid public discourse, interpret the world, and inform those who are uninformed and disinformed? The answer is at best mixed and lamentably leans towards the negative.

The qualities that make radio and TV powers to contend with are also the same qualities that have led to the erosion of broadcast journalism's providing relevant information. The pervasiveness of broadcast media may have resulted to an abundance of information, but whether this information has generated an understanding of the world by its inhabitants is a different question altogether.

Intellectual and critical discourse requires a level of engagement from the public and media. There have been efforts from both radio and TV to meet this duty, but not enough. Primetime news, for instance, are not exactly “primetime” since telenovelas and soap operas occupy the time slots that have the most viewers and consequently, most advertisers. More and more, news and documentaries are relegated to the fringes of programming—either early evening or late night, but never during peak time. Multi-awarded investigative programs, like Probe, are aired at around 11:00 p.m.-12:30 a.m., a period referred to as “dead hour” in TV because of the significant drop in viewers.

Indeed, the dominance of market forces is evident in Philippine broadcast journalism. In the war for ratings, media networks seek to attract and retain the attention of users either by sensationalism or an unwarranted focus on per-

sonalities, says Prof. Roland Tolentino, dean of the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication (UP CMC). He adds that there also is a hesitation to air news that will disturb and disrupt. One, because advertisers tend to favor shows that steer away from the controversial and contentious; and two, because, despite the vigilance of media institutions, existing Philippine laws fall short in assuring press freedom.

A turn for the senseless

The TV and radio industries are undeniably commercial. Media users are treated as commodity buyers, and the shows shaped by profit. Thus, broadcast journalists must constantly tread upon this duality of broadcast being profit-oriented and a public service all at the same time.

To popularize news, media have evolved “infotainment”, which focus on senseless entertainment to be popular. The current practice is to devote an entire section of a news program to “infotainment” – “Star Patrol” for *TV Patrol* in ABS-CBN 2, and “Chikka Minute” for *24 Oras* in GMA-7.

Broadcast reports are also limited by airtime; non-special newscasts in *TV Patrol* and *24 Oras* are one to two minutes in length. This restriction has resulted in “sound bite journalism”, in which facts and arguments are condensed into catchphrases that, at best, offer only a cursory look at issues.

Indeed, the public interest so clear in the inception of media is now subsumed under the heavier weight of profit-making. But the airwaves are a public utility. TV and radio networks are not owners but mere “caretakers” (franchise holders) of the airwaves, explains Prof. Rose Feliciano of the UP CMC (“Responsibility to Serve the Public. Philippine Journalism Review”, Jan. 2004).

For journalism to be relevant, it must continue to supply information that allows citizens to take part in governing themselves. To this end, formal training and education play a critical role.

Between journalism and broadcasting

In the Philippines, journalism schools usually concern themselves with print media, first and foremost. Broadcast journalism is left in the general domain of communication, where the distinction between communication arts and mass communication remain hazy.

Compared to print journalism, broadcasting requires more resources to teach. Various kinds of equipment are needed in the three tiers of broadcast produc-



tion—pre-production, production proper, and post-production.

Precisely because it is capital-intensive, few schools have opted to offer broadcasting as a course, said Prof. Sev Sarmenta of the Department of Communication, Ateneo de Manila University.

Prof. Chi-Chi Fajardo-Robles, head of the Technical Committee for Broadcasting of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), agreed. “Even fewer [than communication and journalism schools] are schools that offer specialization in broadcasting. Broadcasting is hardware heavy. You can teach journalism without equipment, it’s skills oriented. But to teach broadcasting, you have to have a radio studio, TV studio, digital equipment. Many schools shy away from that because it means a big capital outlay,” she explained.

The trend, it seems, is to offer broadcasting as a minor track in a larger interdisciplinary program, usually mass communication or communication arts. Such is the practice in Ateneo de Manila University, University of Santo Tomas, and St. Scholastica’s College.

In UP Diliman, however, broadcasting took a different path. UP was first to offer a specialized course on broadcasting, stated Prof. Fernando Austria Jr. of the UP CMC. Consequently, it was UP’s broadcasting curriculum that was used as template for CHED’s standards broadcasting program.

The said curriculum is not without flaws, though. The emphasis on technical know-how is evident in UP’s broadcast curriculum, where over 18 units either teach or require mastery over ra-



Photos by LITO OCAMPO

dio, TV, and editing equipment. Production classes tended to emphasize style over substance, say many broadcast students in UP. In TV and radio newscasts, for instance, the bulk of the student’s grade either goes to acting or directing, while scripts receive only cursory checking.

A compromise

CHED first released a broadcast curriculum in 1997 to ensure that the quality of teaching in broadcasting schools is at par with the rest of the world’s. Today, there is another broadcasting curriculum being proposed, said Robles. “[We submitted] the curriculum in 2007 or 2008, at least a year ago,” she said.

Half of the year 2009 has gone by, yet the curriculum has yet to be passed due, in part, to bureaucratic red tape. “In fact, we’re quite disappointed that this curriculum has taken too long to be approved...It should be useful to look at it again because we might have to make changes in it again.”

The standardization of the broadcast curriculum is an effort to ensure the quality of broadcast education in learning institutions, as well as a response by government to the unique demands of Philippine broadcasting. But only the minimum in teaching broadcasting is required by the CHED curriculum.

It’s a compromise dictated by the realities of Philippine education. “If we shoot for the stars, many schools may not be able to comply,” Robles explained. “If a school can go beyond the minimum requirements because they have the initiative, they have the resources, well and good. But every school has to meet the minimum standards.”

Unlike the 1997 CHED curriculum, the revised curriculum redefined the courses in the broadcast program into three classifications: core courses, major and required courses and electives.

Core courses must be taken by any communication student regardless of specialization, wheth-

er in journalism, broadcasting, or general communication. The core courses include Introduction to Communication, Introduction to Communication Theory and Research, Communication and Society, Media Law and Ethics, Thesis, and Internship. “These must be uniformly taught across specialization,” said Robles.

The new curriculum includes classes in communication theory, ethics, and media in society in part to address the mediocrity in broadcast practice. Also, a thesis is now a must for completion, something which other schools, such as Ateneo de Manila University, do not require at present.

Major and required courses, meanwhile, are specialized classes for broadcasting. These courses give the student a firm grounding on the demands of broadcasting, including technique and technical know-how.

Finally, the curriculum also provides for electives. Available classes include advanced courses in radio and TV production. The suggested electives aim to give students even more specialized skills than those taught in the major and required courses. But students may also opt to obtain electives in other colleges, such as sociology and political science.

Undeniably, there is a need to review and enhance the learning process in broadcast journalism. Hopes for addressing the imperfections and flaws of the broadcast industry depend on the training of future broadcast journalists who will one day take over the practice.

Professors and practitioners alike are in agreement that broadcast journalism schools should offer, more than anything, courses that will give students an appropriate foundation on media theory and the role of media in society.

Before techniques and technical skills, the emphasis must be on the relation of a free press to democracy, said Tolentino. Implicit in that is the unique role of broadcast journalism in public life, a function that is related but distinct from TV and radio’s entertainment function. Whether such distinction is satisfied by the new CHED curriculum is an issue that must be resolved.

Indeed, the power of broadcast media to influence and inform is ambivalent—it can work like a charm, but also as a dagger. Which way it will go? The deciding factor is a firm understanding of media’s role in society by both audience and practitioners. Improving and revising the broadcasting curriculum will not, of course, solve all of the practice’s problems. But it is certainly a step towards that. ■

Everything I know, I learned on the job

Most students get into broadcasting thinking about the glamor and power, and even the money, of being on air

■ By RG Cruz

BY NOV. 21 this year, I will have spent exactly eight years in the profession of journalism. It was in Nov. 21 of 2001, about seven months after graduating from the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication (UP CMC), that I landed my first job. In the months between my graduation and being hired, I confidently mass mailed my resume to all the media outfits I could find here and abroad in hopes I would land that elusive first job. I was even a bit cocky, thinking that my education from the country's top mass media school would land me a job just like that and put me on the fast track to a bright career.

Boy, was I dead wrong.

Don't get me wrong. With all due respect to my professors and the institutions inside the State University, they gave me the best education that could be offered at THAT time.

I had a rude awakening when I got my first job and realized that none of what I picked up in school would help me even if to at least just coast along. I could even dare say that most, if not all of the skills I have now as a journalist I learned on the job, and not from school.

On a very regular basis I have been invited to give career talks in many schools, been interviewed by graduating students for their theses—all on topics going along the lines of how journalists become the journalists that they are. My answer has always been consistent: during your formative days in the profession, you spend a considerable amount of time "un-learning" what you picked up in college.

I majored in Broadcast Communication—a technology-driven field. These days to be a competent broadcaster, you must not only be able to perform on air (whether for radio or TV) but also be able to perform off the air (that's off camera work if you're on TV).

Most students get into broadcasting thinking about the glamor and power, and maybe even the money of being on air and having a live audience at home. What they fail to realize is that a lot of what you see on TV or hear on the radio is the product of team effort—a

team with many functions.

I have always believed that this is something that should have been discussed in school. During my time at the UP CMC, yes, productions for radio or TV were emphasized to be team efforts. Yet it must be pointed out that that we had very cursory training in the skills that were required to make being a member of such a team a much more fulfilling experience.

For example: for our basic radio and TV production classes, we trained on obsolete equipment. I mean in 2001, who was using non-computerized broadcast equipment? While knowing the basics of non-computerized broadcast equipment is good, the reality is that students, upon entering the workplace after graduation, have to learn a new set of skills—when what they learned in school should be something they should just be supplementing when they get to the workplace.

Another point: audio and video editing is a basic skill all broadcasters should have because practically everything that goes on air whether on radio or TV goes through some sort of audio-video editing—that's splicing sound bites and images for you non-broadcast majors—in order to make a cohesive piece. During my time, basic audio-video editing was just an elective.

To make matters worse, THAT elective was taught using obsolete editing equipment nobody even uses anymore. Today, audio video

editing is done on Avid, or Final Cut, computers. Back then we were taught with linear editing machines where tapes are manually and literally spliced and recorded over. These days networks and media companies are already going digital and going into tapeless workflows.

The mechanics of digital audio video productions were also something we just learned in our companies when this is a basic skill all broadcasters should have.

But enough about the technical side of it. Let's go into the policy and philosophical side of mass media education.

Ethics for one. Mass media ethics is actually universal—same principles apply regardless of whether you're in movie production, broadcasting, print journalism, research or new media like the Internet. And yet what we got in the broadcast communication curriculum—compared to what CMC journalism majors were getting—didn't reflect the ethical dilemmas that mass media practitioners face every day. There were very cursory discussions (read: just one subject, one semester in four years) on ethical situations in the workplace that sometimes span years before being solved. Bribery? Do you know there are many ways to go about bribery in the media and to make it appear that you're not being bribed when you are actually being bribed—if you think about the real intent of why you're being given what you're being given?

You'd be surprised if you ask how today's practicing journalists have twisted and contorted the principles of mass media ethics to excuse their benefitting from perks and privileges. Many of them are either unaware or simply ignore both the letter and the spirit of the ethical principle in favor of the convenience that the letter of the law, so to speak, offers. The ethical training during my time as a broadcast communication major was certainly not enough to build us good, working moral compasses. The ethical principles taught were more on the general rather than the cognitive side of the actual ethical dilemmas that confront journalists daily.

Take broadcast journalism education for another example. In my time, mass communication students got two journalism subjects but only one was mandatory—Journalism 101, which as the name suggests is more about the basics of journalism in general—which is basically more print than broadcast oriented. The other journalism subject, Broadcast Journalism 133, was an elective. And again, to make things worse, neither course, while giving us the basics, addressed

questions on, for example, how do you build a proper newscast, one that doesn't cause undue alarm with both what the news is about and how you say the news? How do you build a proper documentary, a proper field report?

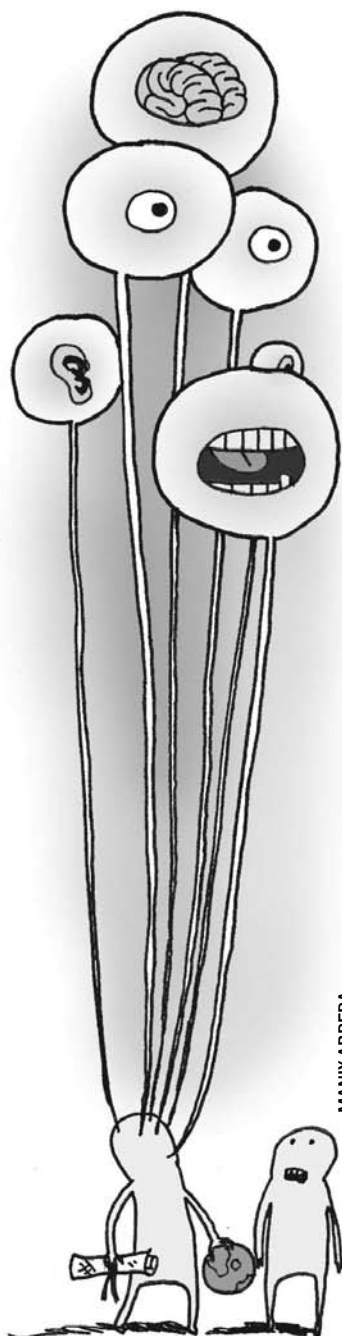
There was not a single course on beat reporting, and on doing special reports, field camerawork and building up a network of sources. What are the acceptable and unacceptable practices?

The new media should be a course—nah, a major by itself. Considering that the Internet has become as pervasive as traditional media, it also deserves its own field of study. Furthermore, the study of new media should factor in the convergence strategies of most media content providers.

Back in my day, we were all required to intern before graduation—that's 100 hours each for TV and radio. Most of my classmates tried out in the big companies and big networks, where the interns are relegated to mostly menial tasks like being gofers for the staff. That—I don't know how useful that would be. Big companies may not always be inclined to let students do something more significant than getting coffee, running for something, or photocopying. Smaller companies on the other hand, such as the government networks, since they are badly funded, have fewer staff, and need all the help they can get—and so will be more willing to let students go through the entire gamut of skills one will need. Lastly, I feel that mass media education can devote more time and effort on the power of the media to shape the life of an entire nation—or even of the world. Mass media is power, power wielded only by the hands of a few. We ought to make sure it is wielded more responsibly.

Mass media is such a dynamic field. It changes with the changes in technology. Skills evolve. So do ethical dilemmas and practices. Yet, the power mass media wield will always be the same—a very powerful combination of power over the minds, hearts and actions of an entire nation. One stroke of the pen, one word on air, one dramatic picture—whether it be on TV, radio, print or the Internet—can send stock markets crashing, cause rallies and protests on the streets, put a military and police on war footing, even start a regime change in some instances. We better make sure this power is wielded very well or else we will get the society we deserve. ■

RG Cruz is a reporter for ABS-CBN 2 and news presenter for the ABS-CBN News Channel (ANC).



CRISIS

NATIONAL



Seraspe

LITO OCAMPO

Damalerio, Esperat awarded posthumously

SLAIN JOURNALISTS Edgar Damalerio and Marlene Esperat were awarded posthumously the 2009 Titus Brandsma Award Philippines for Press Freedom last July 29.

Damalerio and Esperat were chosen because "they had lived the spirit of Blessed Titus Brandsma and stood for the truth in times of threats (and) compromises, despite (the) odds and reprisals from the powers that-be (sic)," the Titus Brandsma Media Center said. Blessed Titus Brandsma, known as the "Martyr of Press Freedom," fought for the freedom of the press during the second World War in the Netherlands.

Sultan Kudarat-based journalist Esperat was known for exposing anomalies in the regional office of the Department of Agriculture (DA), where she formerly worked as resident ombudsman. She wrote about the anomalies she discovered including the fertilizer megascam of 2004 in her column. She also filed administrative cases against DA officials.

On March 24, 2005, a gunman shot Esperat in front of her children in their home in Tacurong City. The gunman and his accomplices were convicted in 2006, but the alleged masterminds remain free despite a warrant for their arrest issued in Oct. 2008.

Damalerio was known for his exposés on allegedly anomalous and illegal transactions involving local government officials, policemen, military people as well as fellow journalists in Pagadian City. He also filed cases against those he reported as allegedly involved in wrongdoing.

On May 13, 2002, Damalerio was shot dead while driving along a street in Pagadian with his two

companions Edgar Amoro and Edgar Ongue. The gunman, former police officer Guillermo Wapile was convicted in Nov. 2005.

The Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists (FFFJ), a coalition of six media organizations to address attacks on and threats to press freedom in the country, was launched in 2003 after a media dialogue on the Damalerio case. The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) is a founding member of TFFJ and serves as its secretariat.

During the awards ceremony, Esperat's eldest daughter Janice Seraspe shared how much her mother valued and searched for truth. "She said she was ready to die for her cause," Seraspe said, adding that the awards and praises her mother had received posthumously have been Marlene's "legacy to her grandchildren."

Dodie Lacuña of RPN-9 received the award for Damalerio in behalf of the Damalerio family.

Journalists Howie Severino (GMA-7) and Patricia Evangelista (ABS-CBN News Channel and *Philippine Daily Inquirer*) also received the Titus Brandsma Award for Leadership in Journalism and Emergent Leadership in Journalism, respectively. The jury chose Severino and Evangelista for "effectively us(ing) media to respond to (the) people's clamor for truth on issues and concerns affecting them."

The Titus Brandsma Award Philippines is a biennial award given to journalists who have "integrity, commitment and consistency in reporting, advocacy for press freedom, principled vigilance, fearless courage in dealing with significant issues, and continuing effort to create a critical readership and viewership," the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication's Florangel Braid, chair of the board of judges, said.

Broadcaster killed in Surigao del Sur

A BROADCASTER in Surigao del Sur was killed last July 27 a few hours before Pres. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo delivered her ninth State of the Nation Address.

A gunman approached and shot broadcaster Godofredo Linao Jr. four times along the provincial road at Purok 1, Barobo town at around 1:15 a.m., according to Surigao del Sur Provincial Police Director Col. Richard De la Rosa. The gunman was accompanied by another man who was waiting on a motorcycle approximately 20 meters from where the shooting happened.

Linao hosted the blocktime public affairs program "Straight

to the Point" with Romy Santiago over *Radyo Natin* (Our Radio) in Bislig City every Friday. According to *Radyo Natin* station manager Mario Alviso, the program was sponsored by Vice Governor Librado Navarro of Surigao del Sur, for whom Linao worked as a spokesperson.

Linao also occasionally anchored a program over the radio station 94.5 *Magic Love FM* in Barobo which discussed the structure and works of the organization *Kapamilya Walang Iwanan Association*, of which he was a member. Linao, according to his wife, had been in the broadcasting business for eight years.

The local police said Linao had apparently just parked across the road and was on his way to a local restaurant when he was shot. De la Rosa said Linao's motorcycle was on still its stand when police found it.

Linao had allegedly received a message on his mobile phone inviting him to go to the restaurant. Alviso told the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) that Linao was in Bagobo to celebrate the town fiesta. According to Alviso, Linao's friends who were with him that night said he read the message and said he would go to the restaurant. It is still unclear who sent the message.

According to Linao's widow Virginia, he left their home in Bislig City, July 25 and was to spend his weekend in Barobo. "He told me he would come back on Monday (July 27, 2009)," Virginia said.

Virginia and Alviso both said Linao had not told them of any recent threat. "We don't (usually) receive threats, we are just targeted right away," Alviso was quoted as saying in several reports.

Virginia said her family believes the killing could be "70 percent related to politics" and "30 percent related to his broadcasting." Linao would have run as a candidate for provincial board member in Surigao del Sur this coming 2010 elections.

Virginia also told CMFR that Linao received threats every time he ran for a government post. Linao had served as a purok president for two terms, district president for two terms, and village councilor for five years. His last electoral bid was in 2007 when he ran for provincial board member, but lost.

Alviso said Linao's killing could be related to his blocktime program on *Radyo Natin*. Linao discussed corruption in the local government. His latest commentary criticized the purchase of 10 vans by the city government amid the economic crisis and lay-offs in the province. "It cannot be helped if he had stepped on

someone's toes....Maybe he didn't expect that it will happen," Alviso said in Filipino.

Alviso also told CMFR that he received a text message last July 28 saying that the death of Linao was just a sample of what s/he can do and he (Alviso) would be next. Alviso said it came hours after he discussed on air some inconsistencies in the investigation on the killing of Linao. CMFR tried calling the mobile number (+639089869061) used, but no one answered the call.

Police said they are still looking into the possible motives behind the killing.

Linao is the sixth journalist/media practitioner killed in the Philippines in 2009. Five out of those killed worked for radio. Before Linao, a volunteer broadcaster had been killed in Agusan del Sur, a province in the same region as Surigao del Sur.

Three media practitioners killed in June

THREE MEDIA practitioners in Southern Luzon and Mindanao were killed in separate incidents last June. According to the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR), 121 of the 134 recorded cases of media killings since 1986 (or nearly 90 percent) happened outside Metro Manila.

Last June 12, Antonio Castillo, a columnist for the local tabloid *Bigwas* (Blow), died three hours after being shot by a gunman who later fled on a motorcycle in Uson town, Masbate. According to the Philippine National Police, a murder complaint was filed against an alias Joyjoy and several John Does before the Provincial Prosecutor's Office in Masbate last July 2. The motive behind the killing remains unclear.

At around 9 a.m., a gunman on a motorcycle shot Castillo, who was himself on a motorcycle, along the national highway in Purok 1, Marcella village, Uson town. *GMANews.TV* quoted Uson town police chief Senior Inspector Aurora Moran as saying that "He (Castillo) was chased up to Sawang village (Uson town) where he sought refuge in a house and the attackers fled." Castillo was rushed by members of the Philippine Army stationed in Uson to the Masbate Provincial Hospital.

A June 14 *Manila Bulletin* report said that the investigators thought Castillo would survive and could identify his assailants. But Castillo died three hours after the attack.

Moran explained in a phone interview that Castillo had told police investigators that he recognized the gunman and driver but refused to give their names when asked at the hospital. A police spot report said the gunman was wearing a light blue shirt and no helmet, while the driver was wearing a black jacket and a red helmet.

Three days earlier (June 9), Crispin Perez Jr., a radio commentator at the local government-owned FM radio station dwDO in San Jose City, Occidental Mindoro, died at hospital of gunshot wounds inflicted by an unknown gunman outside his home at around 10 a.m. Earlier reports said Perez had been stabbed, but Major Alberto Villapando, head of the police team assigned to investigate the case, told CMFR in a phone interview that Perez had been shot twice with a .45 caliber handgun.

The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) and Perez's widow Irene filed last July 2 a murder complaint against the alleged gunman, Police Officer 2 Darwin Quimoyog, before the Department of Justice.

In her affidavit, Irene identified Quimoyog as the lone gunman who shot Perez. Irene told CMFR in a phone interview that she saw the gunman talking to her husband outside their home. She said she saw the assailant holding a gun after she heard two consecutive shots. Irene said she tried but was not able to chase the gunman who immediately boarded a motorcycle after shooting Perez.

Local police in San Jose town later recovered the motorcycle the gunman allegedly used when he fled the scene. The motorcycle was traced to Quimoyog, who allegedly bought it last June 5. Several witnesses said that Quimoyog had also used the motorcycle to surveil Perez.

Quimoyog, who was stationed at Magsaysay town in Occidental Mindoro, is now in the custody of the Police Regional Office 4-B-Mimaropa at Camp Eugenio Navarro in Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro, according to the NBI.

Perez was one of three anchors in the "Sa Totoo Lang" (For Real) program, which aired from Monday to Friday from 6:30 to 8:00 a.m. Station Manager Ferdie Data of dwDO told CMFR that the public affairs program promoted government projects and addressed issues in government. The two other anchors were also government officials who were both members of a barangay (village) council—a *kagawad* (councilor) and a barangay captain, he said.

CRISIS

Perez, a lawyer and a former Occidental Mindoro vice governor (July 1992 to July 1995), joined the program in the third week of May. Perez also had his own program every Saturday, which was aired simultaneously at dwDO and *Radyo Natin* stations from 12 nn to 1 p.m. The program, Data said, began at around Jan. 2009.

Irene said her husband had also worked as a radio commentator at around 2003 to 2004 at dZYM station, but stopped to focus on his practice as a lawyer. Irene said Perez also worked as a part-time municipal legal consultant.

Irene Perez and Data said Perez's killing may be work-related. Perez may have made enemies for his criticisms of mining and a supply contract between a local cooperative and a private power firm, among others, Data said.

Weeks after the two incidents in Southern Luzon, another radio commentator was killed in Bayugan, Agusan del Sur.

Jonathan Petalvero of dxVM-FM radio station was shot in the head by a lone gunman around 7:30 p.m. last June 25 inside a restaurant at the Rotonda, Poblacion village. Contrary to earlier reports, Bayugan Police Chief Inspector Rudy Cuyop told the CMFR in a phone interview that the gunman fled on foot and not onboard a motorcycle. Quoting witnesses, Cuyop also denied earlier reports that the gunman was wearing a ski mask.

Police have a cartographic sketch of the suspect, but they still have to determine the motive behind the killing. The shell of a .45 caliber round was also recovered within the premises of the incident.

Petalvero, who was also a *kagawad* at a village in Bayugan, hosted the program "*Balita at Komentaryo* (News and Commentary)" over local station dxVM-FM, along with station owner Genesis Efren Sr., who is also the town vice mayor. The program is aired from 6 to 8 a.m. every Monday. But in a July 2009 report of Task Force Usig, the police said Petalvero is not a commentator but a regular resource speaker for the radio program.

Efren told CMFR that Petalvero had joined the program last Dec. 2008. He said the dxVM-FM station, local franchise holder of the dxSF network owned by the Agusan Communications Foundation Inc., began airing in Nov. 2008.

Efren said Petalvero had no prior experience as a broadcaster. Petalvero was said to have volunteered to join the program and did not receive any compensation for his work. Efren believes the killing may be related to Petalvero's com-

mentaries on corruption issues in local government. Petalvero did not mention receiving any threat prior to the shooting incident, according to Efren and Petalvero's widow, Girlie.

According to a June 30 report by the Manila newspaper *Philippine Star*, Petalvero was planning to run for vice mayor in the coming 2010 elections, with Efren as his running mate. Girlie confirmed that Petalvero was indeed planning to run for vice mayor, but said that he was planning to run as an independent.



Trajano

REIMATE

Reporter killed during drug raid

A TABLOID reporter covering an anti-illegal drugs operation was killed in a gunfight between the police team he came with and the alleged members of a crime syndicate in the town of Taytay, Rizal last June 3.

Tiburcio "Jojo" Trajano Jr., a correspondent of the Manila-based tabloid *Remate* in Rizal, was shot as he was allegedly helping a wounded police officer, *The Philippine Star* quoted Rizal provincial police director Senior Supt. Ireneo Dordas as saying. Trajano was pronounced dead at the Manila East Medical Hospital upon arrival. The police officer he helped, PO2 Virgilio Dela Cruz, also died.

At around 3 a.m. (local time), armed men led by a certain "Soren" fired at the Rizal Provincial Special Operations Group which had just entered the house allegedly occupied by Soren's group. Dordas told Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) last 4 June 2009 that the police have apprehended six alleged members of the drug syndicate.

Remate's publisher Rey Briones told CMFR that Trajano advised his editors about a week ago that he would join a police operation. A June 4 report in *Remate* said Trajano was supposed to take exclusive photos on the raid.

Briones and Trajano's partner

Raquel Tejada told CMFR that Trajano usually joined police operations to get stories. "It's his style. He doesn't rely on press releases," Briones said in Filipino.

"It was an unfortunate incident...Yesterday, I was expecting his usual news advisory but what I received was news that he had been killed in the raid," Briones told CMFR last June 4.

The incident prompted PNP Chief Director-General Jesus Versoza to order the review of procedures in letting reporters join police operations, the online news site *GMANews.TV* reported.

"We will review the procedures pertaining to that but we have left it to the territorial units to see to the safety of everybody—not only of operatives but also others who join police operations."

Journalists held at checkpoint

MEMBERS OF the Philippine Army stationed at Bagan village in Guindolongan, Maguindanao held 52 journalists at a checkpoint for over an hour last June 30 to allegedly "guarantee their safety."

The journalists from Manila and nearby Mindanao provinces were on their way to visit evacuation centers in Datu Piang, Maguindanao as part of a three-day joint media coverage of the state of "barkwits" or evacuees in Mindanao when the soldiers manning a checkpoint at Bagan village refused to let them pass. The journalists, who were in a convoy of eleven cars, were held from 8 to 9 a.m.

The number of evacuees or internally displaced persons in Mindanao, estimated at around 700,000 by the government's National Disaster Coordinating Council, has surged as a result of fighting between government forces and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) after a memorandum of agreement over ancestral domain—which has blocked the signing of a final peace agreement—between the Arroyo administration and the MILF leadership was revoked in Aug. 2008.

Nony Espina, vice-chair of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) and one of the journalists held, told CMFR that the soldiers at the checkpoint said they had been ordered by Col. Medardo Geslani, 601st Infantry Brigade (IB) commander, to "hold" the media. The journalists were not to be "released" without Geslani's clearance, Espina added.

When asked why they were being held, the soldiers could not give any clear answer, said Espina.

The *Philippine Daily Inquirer* reported last July 1 that the soldiers tried to bring the journalists to the 64th Infantry Battalion headquarters upon the orders of Maj. Gen. Alfredo Caytona, commander of the 6th Infantry Division (to which the 601st IB belongs).

In a phone interview with CMFR, Col. Geslani claimed the military "had to secure" the area from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and lawless groups before letting the journalists pass. He said they needed an hour to secure the area since detecting IEDs and clearing the area had to be done "meticulously".

"We wanted to guarantee their safety and security. Never mind if we delayed them, at least they were safe. It's my responsibility anyway if something happens to them." Two weeks ago, according to Geslani, the Army recovered around 45 IEDs from the area.

However, Espina said, only members of the media convoy were stopped. "Civilians were still allowed to pass," he said in Filipino. Members of the International Committee of the Red Cross were allowed to pass the checkpoint, reports said.

Asked why civilians were allowed passage, Geslani said the civilians were mostly residents of the village and known to the "bandits" while the journalists and members of civil society organizations were new faces and could be targeted. The ICRC members, the *Inquirer* reported, were allowed passage by Monday (June 29) evening. "We were simply ensuring their safety. There's nothing more to it," Geslani said in Filipino.

Journalists' groups, however, said they believe that the Army was delaying media coverage as civil society groups had reported that the military had been involved in food blockades and harassment of civilians.

The incident was reminiscent of the arrest and detention of some three dozen journalists and media technicians at the Peninsula Hotel in Manila on Nov. 2007, when they were covering a press conference by military officers who had gone to the hotel from a court hearing on charges of plotting a coup d'etat. The governmental Commission on Human Rights has condemned the military action as illegal.

The Mindanao ComStrat and Policy Alternatives, the Center for Community Journalism and Development, the Institute of War and Peace Reporting, *MindaNews*, the NUJP, and the Peace and Conflict Journalism Network organized the

three-day joint coverage, *MindaNews* reported.

Gunmen fire at media offices

TWO UNIDENTIFIED gunmen riding on a motorcycle fired at the building where Bangued-based media offices are housed last June 17. Bangued is the capital of Abra province.

Police, however, told Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) that they have yet to establish if the shooting was aimed at the Catholic-run community weekly newspaper *Abra Today*, along with affiliates dzPA and dwWM radio stations which hold offices at the St. Arnold Janssen Communication Center. A law firm and a non-government organization, among others, also have offices in the same building.

Maj. Adonis Guzman, Bangued chief of police, told CMFR that witnesses heard two gunshots at around 9:30 p.m. Guzman said a security guard who saw the shooting told them the first shot was fired near the Divine College around 30 meters from the St. Arnold Janssen Communication Center.

The second shot, Guzman said, hit the steel gate of the basement in the ground floor of the building. The basement houses the building's generator and some cars among others. The *Abra Today* office is located on the second floor, above the basement.

Fr. Carmelo Gonzales, who oversees the media organizations, said the incident happened "maybe to scare us in the media." Gonzales told CMFR that the most immediate link he can see was an *Abra Today* news article and editorial about corruption in a local electric cooperative, which they also suspect was involved in the attack on *Abra Today* News Editor Marjorie Bandayrel-Trinidad.

Unidentified gunmen had earlier fired at Trinidad's family's house. Trinidad and her family were unhurt in the May 14 attack.

Guzman said police recovered a slug in the premises of the building. But the slug was too deformed to indicate what caliber it was.

"I don't know what to do now," Trinidad told CMFR. She said she had not received any threat before the recent attack and was unsure if the shooting incident was linked to the earlier one.

Gonzales said he was pleased that local government officials had pledged to assist in the speedy resolution of the case. "*Kung sakasakali* (If ever), this will bring peace to Abra," he said. ■

CRISIS

INTERNATIONAL

Former official arrested for murder of Ukrainian journalist

A FORMER Interior ministry official who served under former Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma was arrested last July 21 for the murder of Ukrainian journalist Georgy Gongadze in 2000.

Former Lieutenant General Oleksiy Pukach, head of the interior ministry's surveillance department in 2000, was arrested in July 2009. Upon his detention on July 23, it was reported that Pukach allegedly admitted his participation in Gongadze's killing and named other officials involved. *BBC* said last July 28 that Pukach was the one who allegedly "organized the abduction and personally strangled" Gongadze. *BBC* also reported investigators discovered fragments of Gongadze's skull in Kiev district days after Pukach confessed.

Gongadze's body—burned and decapitated—was found outside Kiev in Nov. 2000, approximately two months after his disappearance on Sept. 16, 2000. Gongadze, publisher of the Internet journal *Ukrainska Pravda* (www.pravda.com.ua), was a known critic of the administration of Kuchma. He had exposed alleged government corrupt activities in *Pravda* and on his radio program at *Radio Kontinent*.

Gongadze's death has been linked to Kuchma, whose former bodyguard leaked a taped conversation between him and then-interior minister Yuriy Kravchenko about killing the journalist. Kuchma admitted that he was the one talking but said the recording had been altered.

The lawyer of the Ukraine-based Institute of Mass Information, Roman Golovenko, however said that Pukach's testimony in itself would be insufficient to convict more senior officials. He explained that the passage of time and the 2005 death of Kravchenko in a dubious suicide make it difficult to try the politicians who ordered the murder and who have evaded justice thus far. Still, Golovenko believes Pukach's testimony will be important in terms of shedding light on who physically committed the murder.

Three police officers were convicted for the kidnapping and murder of Gongadze in March 2008. During their trial, the policemen alleged that Pukach committed the murder.—IFEX

Cambodian government urged to stop repression

FREE SPEECH advocates and press organizations led by the Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA) denounced the "rapidly and palpably deteriorating environment for free expression" in Cambodia. The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility is a founding member of SEAPA.

In an open letter to Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen last July 17, they called on the Cambodian government to put a stop to the "systematic" attacks against the press, lawyers, parliamentarians, and human rights defenders which has "severely restricted the space for press freedom and political speech in Cambodia."

Below is the text of the open letter sent to the Cambodia Prime Minister:

An Open Letter to Prime Minister Hun Sen on The Deteriorating State of Freedom of Expression in Cambodia

*The Office of Prime Minister Hun Sen
Phnom Penh
Kingdom of Cambodia*

Dear Prime Minister Hun Sen:

We, the undersigned, representing free expression advocacy groups from around Southeast Asia, are gravely concerned by a palpably deteriorating freedom of expression and civil rights environment in Cambodia.

Since 2008, the government of Prime Minister Hun Sen has been witness and apparent party to an alarming series of crackdowns on news editors, reporters, members of parliament, and human rights defenders.

We perceive a systematic attack on the press, parliament, and the legal community, all of which — taken especially with the exploitation of a weak and politicized judiciary — have severely compromised the environment for free expression in Cambodia.

Consider:

- *On July 11, Khim Sambo, a journalist of "Moneaksika Khmer (Khmer Conscience)" newspaper was shot dead along with his son over his reports deemed critical by the government.*
- *A month before that, "Moneaksika Khmer's" editor Sam Dith was slapped with criminal charges over an article that suggested links between Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Nam Hong and the past Khmer Rouge regime. While formal charges continued to hang over him, Sam Dith was released from detention after international pressure was brought to bear, and only after he was forced to apologize to the foreign minister. On 8 July this year, charges against Sam Dith were dropped, after another formal letter of apology (this time addressed to PM Hun Sen) — along with a "voluntary" resolution to cease publication of his newspaper.*
- *On June 26, Hang Chakra, the publisher and editor-in-chief of the "Khmer Machas Srok" was meted a one-year prison sentence. He was tried in absentia, despite the fact that he never fled or left the country. He was also fined 9 million Riel or (about US\$2250), a considerable sum in Cambodia, for "disinformation" and for "dishonoring public officials".*
- *On June 22, the National Assembly controlled by the ruling Cambodia People's Party suspended the parliamentary immunity of two members of the opposition Sam Rainsy Party (SRP). The move paved the way for defamation charges brought by PM Hun Sen and the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces against opposition legislators Mu Sochua and Ho Vann.*
- *Far from stopping there, the government then also went after the oppositionists' lawyers. Kong Sam Onn, the legal counsel who represent-*

ed Mu Sochua and Ho Vann, was himself charged with defamation by PM Hun Sen. He was also threatened with disbarment. Like the editor Sam Dith, Kong Sam Onn was forced to apologize to the prime minister, and then compelled to join the ruling party, in return for the withdrawal of the case against him.

The developments above seem not only to be politically motivated, but also symptomatic of a general attempt to restrict the overall environment for free expression in Cambodia. We note that in all their cases against journalists, the country's political leaders have totally ignored Cambodia's Press Law of 1995, and instead invoked the more disproportionate provisions of the country's criminal code.

We urge the government of Cambodia to cease this campaign threatening freedom of expression and the fundamental rights of its citizens. PM Hun Sen and the ruling party of Cambodia must:

- 1. Drop all politically motivated charges against their critics, without precondition or further harassment;*
- 2. Revamp Cambodia's rigid criminal code which contains broad and vague provisions, particularly on defamation and disinformation;*
- 3. Use only appropriate legal instruments, namely the Press Law of 1995, to deal with issues concerning the media; and*
- 4. Ensure the safety and respect for the work of human rights lawyers and advocates, and put a stop to all harassment (legal and otherwise) against the country's media community. Any legal proceedings against the government's critics should be pursued only in a transparent and fair manner, under assuredly independent courts, in accordance with the Cambodian Constitution and international norms.*

Ultimately, Cambodia must demonstrate its commitment to its own Constitutional guarantees for free expression as well as to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which it is a party and signatory. It must also begin to live up to the spirit and values now expressed in the new ASEAN Charter which, among other things, acknowledges the need to uphold "respect for the fundamental freedoms (and) the promotion and protection of human rights" consistent with a principle for "upholding the United Nations Charter and international law".

The recent actions of the Cambodian leadership threaten the rights of its citizens, and undermine the stated values, principles, and directions of the larger ASEAN community to which it belongs.

Signed by:

- Nazar Patria, President, Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), Indonesia*
- Um Sarin, President, Cambodian Association for the Protection of Journalists (CAPI)*
- Virak Ou, President, The Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), Cambodia*
- V. Gayathry, Executive Director, Center for Independent Journalism (CIJ), Malaysia*
- Melinda Quintos de Jesus, Executive Director, Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR), Philippines*
- Tedjabayu, Director for Training Program, Institute for Studies on the Free Flow of Information (ISAI), Indonesia*
- Peter Noolander, Director, Media Legal Defence Initiative, Great Britain*
- Malou Mangahas, Executive Director, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ), Philippines*
- Boonrat Apichattraison, Vice President, Thai Journalists Association (TJA), Thailand*
- Dipendra, Coordinator, Southeast Asian Media Defense Lawyers Network (SAMDLN)*
- Hon. Teodoro A. Casiño, Representative, Bayan Muna Party List, Philippines House of Representative*
- Roby Alampay, Executive Director, Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA)*

CHRONICLE

2010 Daniel Pearl Awards

FILIPINO JOURNALISTS may submit their best "cross-border" investigative reports in the Daniel Pearl Awards for Outstanding International Investigative Reporting. Deadline is on January 15, 2010.

Formerly called the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists Awards, the biennial contest seeks to honor either a single work or a single-subject series which involve reporting in at least two countries on a topic of world significance.

Any professional journalists or a team of journalists working in any medium are eligible to join the competition. Only one entry per applicant is allowed.

Two \$5,000 first-place prizes will be awarded each to a U.S.-based reporter or news outlet, and another to a non-U.S.-based journalist or news outlet.

For application details, visit <http://www.publicintegrity.org/investigations/icij/awards/>.

Rory Peck Awards 2009

Now in its 14th year, the Rory Peck Awards honor freelance cameramen/women in television news and current affairs programs. Deadline is on September 4, 2009.

The entries must have been broadcast between Aug. 1, 2008 and July 31, 2009.

The international competition honors freelance camerawork in three categories: The Rory Peck Award for News (coverage of on-the-day news, where the focus is on the immediacy of the story); The Rory Peck Award for Features (news features/in-depth pieces which look beyond the immediacy of a new story), The Sony Professional Impact Award (news footage which raises humanitarian issues and has had an impact internationally or contributed to a change in perception or policy).

A special award named The Martin Adler Prize may also be given at the discretion of the trustees by the Rory Peck Trust. The award recognizes "a freelancer who has told, or played a vital part in telling a significant news story and the recipient could be a cameraperson or the person who they have depend upon in the field—their fixer, driver or local freelance reporter."

The contest is organized by The Rory Peck Trust, which offers discretionary grants to the families of freelance newsgatherers killed while on assignment. The organization was established in 1995 by close friends and the widow of Rory Peck, a freelance cameraman who was killed while covering a coup d'état outside Ostankino Tower, a free-standing television and radio tower in Moscow, Russia in October 1993.

The awards ceremony will be held on Nov. 19, 2009. For more information, visit The Rory Peck Trust website (<http://www.rorypecktrust.org/>)

Filipino environmental journalist wins U.N. fellowship

A *BusinessMirror* correspondent won this year's United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Journalism Fellowship.

Baguio-based correspondent Imelda Abaño will be the fourth Filipino journalist to receive the fellowship which was established in 1962, *BusinessMirror* reported. She will join three other journalists from Pakistan, Egypt and Ghana to cover the 64th U.N. General Assembly in New York, with sessions from September 15 until mid-November.

The Dag Hammarskjöld Scholarship Fund allows professional journalists from developing countries to come to New York to cover the United Nations during the most active period of the U.N. General Assembly each autumn.

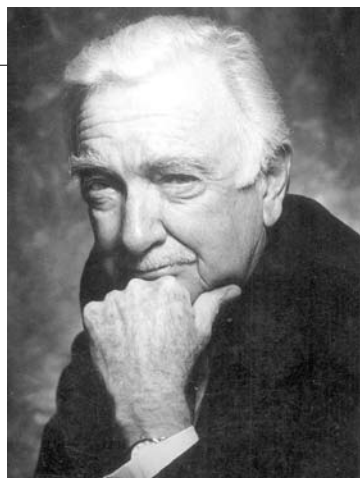
Last year, Abaño received the UN Gold Medal Award on Humanitarian and Development Affairs Reporting for a special coverage of the food riots and deepening poverty in Haiti.

Freelance community journalist is first Filipino EJI scholar

A FREELANCE journalist based in Iloilo City, Iloilo province became the first Filipino recipient of the 2009 European Journalism Institute (EJI) scholarship in Prague, Czech Republic which runs from July 11 to 18, 2009.

Rhea B. Peñaflor writes for various Western Visayas local papers as well as in the *Consumer and Business Forum* magazine. She attended a seven-day intensive program of seminars, lectures and discussions about journalism with 50 journalists all over the world.

EJI is organized by The Fund for American Studies (TFAS) in cooperation with Charles University. ■



CRONKITE, 92

CBS anchor Walter Cronkite passed away last July 17 at age 92. Reports said complications from a cerebrovascular disease caused the death of the broadcast journalism icon.

He was known as "Uncle Walter". Some affectionately called him "Old Iron Pants" for his ability to anchor for hours. He started a national catch-phrase with the way he ended his programs with "And that's the way it is". He was the anchor of CBS Evening News for 19 years, from 1962 to 1981.

Cronkite's coverage of events, his rare displays of emotion on camera, and his contributions in news gathering and reporting made him one of the most influential figures in the US news media. He was "the most trusted man in America." As a social and political critic, he did not only pioneered in broadcast journalism; he also tried to influence the decisions of US government officials.

With a career spanning decades, Cronkite covered numerous world events: World War II's Battle of the Bulge, the Cold War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Nuremberg trials, the civil rights movement, the killing of Martin Luther King Jr., several presidential elections, the moon landings, the assassination of US president John F. Kennedy, and the Watergate scandal during US president Richard Nixon's administration. He was part of an elite corps of war correspondents known as "the Writing 69". He was vocal against the war in Vietnam and also opposed the war in Iraq.

Cronkite started his career in journalism at an early age. He used to deliver newspapers and wrote for his high school paper. He had an early start in his career, dropping out of the University of Texas in Austin to be a newspaper reporter. He later moved into broadcasting as a radio announcer of KCMO in 1935. He briefly worked with the United Press wire service and later, starting in 1950, the news division of CBS.

He retired in 1981, and later became a CBS board member, remaining active despite retirement. He contributed columns for the news website Huffington Post and wrote nationally syndicated columns that appeared weekly in newspapers across the US.

He published his memoir "A Reporter's Life" in 1996. Cronkite re-

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ceived numerous awards of recognition throughout his career, including Emmys and Peabodys. He was awarded the highest civilian honor in the US, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, by Jimmy Carter in 1981.

FORTUNA, 61

Filipino veteran journalist and political analyst Julius Fortuna died last June 23. He was 61 and was a columnist for the People's Journal and The Manila Times at the time of his death.

Fortuna began his career in journalism as a foreign affairs reporter for *The Observer Magazine*. He worked for other news organizations such as the defunct newspapers *Philippine Tribune*, *Daily Globe*, and *Manila Chronicle*. He also wrote for *Sun.Star Manila*.



He was an officer of the National Press Club of the Philippines and represented the organization in the Confederation of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Journalists. Fortuna was a founding member and vice president of Samahang Plaridel (Plaridel Association of Philippine Journalists), a group of senior journalists and communicators. He also served as one of the founders and hosts of the weekly forum Kapihan sa Sulo (Coffee time at Sulo Hotel).

Fortuna was a student activist leader in the '70s who opposed the dictatorial Marcos regime. He participated in the historic First Quarter Storm Movement. He was an officer of the militant youth organization Kabataang Makabayan (Nationalist Youth) as well as the Movement for a Democratic Philippines, a multi-sectoral group which fought against Martial Rule. He was a political prisoner from 1974 to 1981. He became a journalist after he was freed from detention.

VILLADOLID, 79

Former ambassador to the Vatican and journalist Oscar Villadolid died last May 29 at 79.

Villadolid was involved in journalism, public relations, and diplomacy. He was the country's ambassador to the Holy See and Malta from 1991 to 1995. He was also the Philippine representative to the Asia Pacific Economic Conference from 1995 to 1996.

He also worked for various news organizations. He was the editor in chief of the *Philippines Herald* from 1971 to 1972. He also worked for

the *Manila Bulletin* and was a columnist of *BusinessWorld*.

Villadolid had a distinguished career in journalism. He covered various significant events in the country as well as in the region. He was assigned to cover the police and foreign affairs beats. Villadolid was able to interview Sukarno and other dignitaries. He wrote about illegal migrants, the protest marches of labor unions and activist groups, and the plane crash that killed President Ramon Magsaysay.

He was a recipient of the Ten Outstanding Young Men (TOYM) Award in Journalism and of a Smith-Mundt Leadership grant to the United States which allowed him to stay in Harvard and visit several newspapers.

CORTES, 49

Former Associated Press (AP) reporter Claro Cortes III died from complications following a stroke last June 28. He was 49.

Cortes was an active chronicler of various political events and disasters. He covered the last years of the Martial Rule. He reported the February 1986 snap elections as well as the EDSA Revolution. He also covered the coup attempts during the term of former president Corazon Aquino.

He reported the Baguio earthquake which caused a landslide in July 1990. He was one of the journalists and photographers who were able to record and escape the giant pyroclastic cloud of the Mt. Pinatubo eruption in June 1991.

Cortes also worked for the United Press International before moving to AP in 1987. He served as the head secretariat of the Foreign Correspondents Association of the Philippines (FOCAP). He left FOCAP in 2008 because of poor health. (Source: AP)

KLEIN, 91

Veteran journalist and former US president Richard Nixon's press secretary, Herbert G. Klein, died last July 2 at age 91.

Klein served the Copley Newspapers Inc. for 51 years. He worked as its special correspondent, editor in chief, and vice president. His 23 years as the paper's editor in chief made him a known figure in San Diego County.

He graduated from the University of Southern California (USC) with a major in journalism. He was the sports editor of USC's student paper *Daily Trojan*. The university established and named a journalism scholarship after him in 2006.

The political life of Klein was closely associated with former president Nixon. He was publicity director of the Eisenhower-Nixon campaign in California in 1952, special assistant and press secretary of the Nixon campaign from 1959 to 1968, and White House director of communications from 1969 to 1973. ■



LITO OCAMPO

THE DAYS OF CORY AQUINO

Her political legacy deserves revisiting in some future time

■ By Melinda Quintos de Jesus

THE DEATH and the funeral of Corason "Cory" Aquino indicate once again the importance of historical memory. Astounded by the phenomenal outpouring of homage and sympathy from rich and poor, by the long lines of people waiting day and night to pay their last respects, startled by their own desire to participate in the rites of farewell, a generation born after 1983 ask of those who experienced the political tumult of the early eighties to share with them what they remember and perhaps to help them connect the present to the season she graced with her gift of self.

I cannot trust all that I remember about her and about this period. I only know that I was privileged to have crossed her path. After more than two decades, emotion may skew recollection and the retelling may not measure up to the standard requirements of historical or even journalistic accuracy. But even faltering memory has a purpose. What one remembers brings to life the sense of the time, the spirit informing public events, the force of character and personality of persons who determined the course of history. The generation of journalists who had Mrs. Aquino as a public figure would not have been able to guess at the role she would eventually play in the national course of events. But there were some of us who realized quickly enough that she was not just an ordinary person, and that here perhaps was someone called to a moment of destiny.

Married to one of the most charismatic politicians ever seen on our political stage, Mrs. Aquino had evaded the public light that surrounded her husband.

Although she had political lineage on both sides of her own family, she was a familiar figure only to some of the older members of the press still working in 1983. The Aquinos had been living abroad in the last three years before Ninoy's return and death on Aug. 21. Some were quick to recall that she had served them the obligatory coffee and beverage when they visited the Aquino home to talk to the senator. So the image of an "ordinary housewife" was also well formed in the public mind when the assassination shattered the political status quo of the time.

In the days after the killing, a video tape of her public statement while still in Boston made the rounds in homes where we gathered to continue to share information and talk about the outrage of the assassination. The fuzzy image on the Betamax tape did not hide the strength she exuded in the midst of tragedy. Mrs. Aquino spoke in a soft and steady voice, in words that were well chosen, her countenance a mirror of her brave and courageous

heart, I was stunned by this first impression. There was wisdom in this decision to send a message to the Filipino people, a people in shock and sorrow. We could turn to such a person for guidance and direction. We could look up to the dignity she showed in grief and bereavement. Here was someone who would not be afraid to speak truth to power, clearly understanding that the injustice she and her husband suffered was also the people's to bear. Recalling it now, I daresay that was when we received the first of her gifts to the nation.

A mammoth march accompanied the transfer of the body of the slain senator from their home on Times Street to the larger venue of Sto. Domingo Church. The long line of people who waited to pay their final respects snaked out into the courtyard and the streets, much like the lines which formed outside La Salle Greenhills and the Manila Cathedral for her wake. Ninoy's funeral cortege took ten hours to reach its destination at the burial site at the Manila Memorial Park. Anger and defiance, raised fists and protest banners, overlaid the sadness. Hundreds of thousands of people marched as they would in a rally, with militant songs and fists in the air. Memory blurs the occasion, but on one of the milestones in the following year, a protest march to the Manila Memorial reached the site in darkness. Surely tired from the exertion of the demonstration, she called for silence so prayers could be said. The throng stood in a hush, holding up their lighted candles to give homage to the dead and to respect her articulated wish. The showing of her second gift, the authority of her moral ascendancy, shone in the midst of a thousand flickering lights.

In time, I wrote that she alone could unite and lead the opposition. Her character and her integrity, her obvious lack of self-interest, her non-involvement in political power games—she alone could promise credible change. It was this which set her apart from other opposition leaders, *primus inter pares*, the first among equals. She asked that I stop writing about her possible candidacy. "My family has suffered enough." But in time, she submitted to the pressure of what she described as fate.

She articulated this notion of destiny to many people. It was part of her personal view of the meaning of life, of all human existence. It may have been the secret of that awesome calm that many of us felt in her presence, a faith that her prayers called God always to be with her and to guide her every decision. Such contemplative habits are not to be found among politicians but it was what steeled her will to do right and to make sure that the people's interests came first. Her prayerfulness rose from a sure faith which made her ready to act to fulfill God's will. Surely, that too, was a gift to a people characteristically driven to churches and mosques in their every hour of need.

And so through the series of coups launched against her, she would hold fast to the reins of power that she did not seek, because this was her mandate and responsibility. Through the chain of disasters and natural calamity, President Cory would reach out when she could to the people, sustaining the hope of those afflicted with her presence and her prayer.

It is difficult to cover a public person who is not cut out of a set pattern or a pre-cast mold. But the non-politician in her made

an excellent interview; open and honest, she would speak from her heart. Unaided by calculated or practiced sound bites, her flow of conversation expressed what she thought and what she felt, trusting that this would be acceptable, that it would be good enough for the people. As president, her relations with the media were problematic. She was a gracious and eloquent speaker. But the non-politician president was ill-at ease in the scheduled press conferences and relied on other officials to help communicate with reporters. She shed this discomfort in the post-presidential mode. She activated her role as Citizen Cory, showing admirable statesmanship in her dealings with the press and other politicians.

Her political legacy has been written about in these last few days, but it deserves revisiting in some future time, when the country moves farther away from her political era. There is still much work to be done to sort out the issues that made her term so very difficult, to help the rest of the world understand the dilemmas of democratic transition. The period of her post-presidency should also be reviewed in greater detail as it constitutes an important part of her legacy, not just her work for the poor and the powerless. We need also to appreciate more fully the political decisions she had to make after she stepped down from power.

I consider myself privileged to have met her, to have been a journalist in a unique passage of history, to have been able to follow and keep in touch with her journey as a political figure. I can only thank her, for her own generous gift of time and her trust that her side, her story would be told fairly and well. ■