

PJRREPORTS

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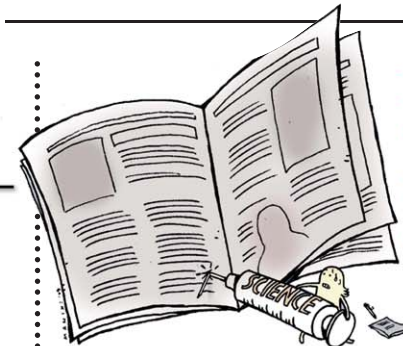
WHAT'SiNSIDE



Media and Elections
Pre-campaign Campaigning



From E-mail to Jail—and Back



Making the Case for Science Journalism



A PERFECT STORM: LESS THAN PERFECT REPORTING



■ By Aloysa Tagumpay E. Escandor

IN ARAYAT, Pampanga, a man hoists his wife and child into a makeshift raft they hope would save them from the floodwaters, even as part of the nearby mountain crumbles under the steady downpour. The man survives the combination of flood and landslide, but his family does not.



Photos by LITO OCAMPO

In Tatalon, Quezon City, the striking combination of water and flame lay waste the shantytown. While floodwaters reach as high as seven feet, a fire started by, people suspect, faulty electrical wiring, razes homes. Evacuating becomes doubly difficult since residents must escape water, raging fire, and electrocution all at the same time.

In the ritzy Provident Village in Marikina City, expensive cars float like matchbox toys in the three-storey high floodwater. People are on the rooftops of their homes while the nearby Marikina

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editor's NOTE

PJRR E P O R T S

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

More than information

FEW FILIPINOS during “normal” times would call the mayor’s office to complain about garbage on the streets, but they seldom hesitate to call the media to intercede in their behalf. They don’t call the police when someone’s firing off a gun in the community either; they call the media for help instead, whether to serve as intermediaries with this or that agency, or as themselves the provider of solutions.

This is markedly evident in broadcasting, where “public service” programs proliferate and rate. These type of programs have been around for decades, and basically consist of listeners’ calling in their complaints. The program host or hosts then call on the appropriate agencies, usually with more than a bit of sarcasm, to do something. In some cases the program hosts telephone the head of the government agency to put him or her on the carpet, and to extract a promise of immediate action.

These programs are driven by the increasing failure of state institutions to provide the many services people need, among them police protection, garbage collection, and, as was being demonstrated by the crisis brought on by tropical storm Ondoy (international name Ketsana) and typhoon Pepeng (international name Parma) during the last week of September and the first weeks of October, rescue and relief.

It was the media that received the most calls for help and served as the people’s link to government agencies as floodwaters rose in Rizal province and Metro Manila last Sept. 26. Filipinos who needed help acted on the assumption that they can’t rely on government agencies, it’s the media they had to call.

What’s been obvious for years is that the media have had to assume roles in Philippine society additional to their basic responsibility of providing information as well as interpretation and analysis on issues of public concern.

The responsibility has been thrust on the media because of critical state failures. No Philippine government has reacted to the media’s assumption of roles that are properly those of governments with the same hostility with which they have greeted the media’s dissemination of unfavorable information. But more than the information they provide, it is the media’s discharge of some of the responsibilities of government that more than anything else indicts the kind of governance that afflicts the Philippines. ■

Luis V. Teodoro

PRESSED FREEDOM

Manix Abrera



The publication of this issue is supported by a grant from the Open Society Institute.



frontPAGE

It was a “perfect storm” but the coverage was less than perfect

speaking of MEDIA

Where's the platform?

“This contest for name recall has been underpinning the personality politics that prevail in national elections, supported, of course, by guns, goons, and gold of political warlords, and massive fraud in the canvassing of votes. The sad thing is that the contest for name recall is not based on solid platforms and accomplishments but by sheer popularity, thus the engagement of showbiz personalities in politics. Indeed, the divide between politics and showbiz is very thin....

“Who is to blame for the sorry state in Philippine elections?

“Civil society groups, the different churches, and even the big media networks have been urging the people to exercise their right to vote, to vote wisely, and to guard their votes. They have also been condemning those who sell their votes. It seems that they are barking at the wrong tree. For what exactly are the people voting for?

“The media is partly to blame for not probing into the candidates’ platforms and merely being content with reporting the intense jockeying for positions, the candidates’ political bickering, exposés and mudslinging, as well as their campaign sorties.”

Benjie Oliveros on Philippine democracy and elections, Bulatlat, Sept. 28

Not Journalists

“One of the 2010 elections’ stickier problems: radio blocktime commentators. Are they legitimate voices in the national dialogue? Or broadcast gunslingers for hire?

“Funded by faceless patrons, blocktimers raise threat levels.

“Institutions or individuals buy airtime at radio stations overseen shakily by the National Telecommunications Commission. No questions are asked.

“The capitol is Cebu Province’s largest blocktimer. Contracts for 2009 reveal airtime fees alone this year may top P4.86 million.

“Nearly half of what the capitol spends monthly for airtime (P200,000) goes to three *Bantay Radyo* AM stations: two in Cebu, one in Oriental Negros. Their owner: Vice Governor Sanchez.

“Political commentaries chewed up more than half (55.5 percent) of all block-time hours. Health topics accounted for 8 percent. Five incumbent elective officials and four ex-officials are spread-eagled as block-timers in eight of Cebu’s 13 AM radio stations.

“And there’s little by way of training blocktimers in professional standards—objectivity, balance, fairness—as the code of ethics provides.

“Blocktimers are not required by law or the KBP’s Broadcast code to reveal funding sources.

“Block time enables incumbents to cam-

paign months ahead of the elections.

Juan Mercado on a study by Sun.Star managing editor Isolde Amante which argues that broadcast blocktimers are not journalists, Philippine Daily Inquirer, Sept. 17

No Ban

“Banning blocktiming during the elections is unconstitutional and a direct violation of press freedom.”

Engineer Greg Senining, blocktimer and president of the Cebu Association of Media Practitioners, responding to the Commission on Elections’ proposal to ban blocktimers, Manila Bulletin, Sept. 22

Politics as drama

“The media has been following this story like a telenovela.”

Sen. Panfilo “Ping” Lacson during a privilege speech describing the media coverage of the Estrada-Lacson exchange of accusations of wrong doing, Sept. 22

Control of web media

“Apart from anti-pornography laws that can throttle freedom of both individual and businesses on cyberspace, the Right to Reply bill filed at the Senate is also seen to have dire effects on Internet freedom.

“The proposal even adds online media as those who have to give space to those allegedly accused.

“Incidentally, there is also a question whether the bill could also affect ordinary people who own blogs and write scathing criticisms or accusations against certain personalities. This also becomes an issue to those who are exercising their own freedom of speech online.

“Arguments against the Right to Reply bill has snowballed beyond media but to just about everyone who practice freedom of speech, including those who own blogs and are part of social networking sites.”

On the unwarranted restriction of online media with the Senate version of the right of reply, Inquirer.net, Sept. 7

Media practitioners on elections

“We are journalists, film makers, artists and new media practitioners. Many of us did not get to vote in past elections due to work assignments or simply because we didn’t care enough after helping oust a dictator in 1986.

“We will not just cast our votes in 2010; we will make sure positive changes will happen in the process by investing our skills, talents, experience, time, and, yes, even our own money —10 pesos to be exact—to get every Filipino to register and vote according to what he/she stands for and believes in.

“As a symbol of our personal investment in the political processes, we will donate ten pesos each to use in our ‘10 in 2010’ campaign: 10 things we will do to ensure clean and honest elections in 2010.”

“10 sa 2010: Tara na, Boto na!”, Unity Statement of selected media practitioners in Mindanao, Sept. 21

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JEERS



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Plagiarism not intended

Sept. 7, 2009

Dear Editor,

This is concerning the plagiarism charge leveled against *abs-cbnNEWS.com* in the story "Lapses" published in the July - Aug. 2009 issue of *PJR Reports*.

Specifically, the statement I refer to is the following:

"Ironically, a third case involves *www.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 acknowledgement, from Cory Aquino's official website (<http://www.coryaquino.ph>)."

The statement referred to this series of articles published on *abs-cbnNEWS.com*:

1. The Essential Cory Aquino: The Young Cory
2. The Essential Cory Aquino: The Unpaved Road to the Presidency
3. The Essential Cory Aquino: Sustaining Stewardship of People Power
4. The Essential Cory Aquino: Her Life with Ninoy Aquino

First, we assure you that we take such charges (plagiarism) seriously here at *abs-cbnNEWS.com*.

Having said that, the series of articles mentioned were indeed lifted from *www.coryaquino.ph*. But it was done with no intended malice, no intention to plagiarize. There was not even any intention to publish without permission.

Days before the death of the former president, we asked Rafael Lopa of the Benigno Aquino Foundation for permission to republish content from their site in a microsite dedicated to the legacy of the former president.

This permission was granted to us through an e-mail from Mr. Lopa dated July 23.

The stories were supposed to be accompanied by an editor's note explaining the provenance of said articles. However, the publisher tasked to publish said articles failed to publish the accompanying editor's note.

We have asked this person to explain the omission. We also had the articles edited to include the missing editor's note as well as our apologies over this matter.

Admittedly, it is unfortunate that we only noticed this omission now, after this was already pointed out in your article.

Our only humble explanation for this is the huge volume of content we had to publish that week.

We hope this explains the issue.

Thank you very much,

Gemma Bagayaua Mendoza
Deputy Editor for Research and Systems
abs-cbnNEWS.com



Scoring the double standard

CHEERS TO *Philippine Daily Inquirer* contributor Roland Simbulan for probing an issue largely ignored by the mainstream media: the alleged double-standard practice of global superpowers in international nuclear weapons policy.

The United Nations and the international community quickly condemn nations that are planning to develop their nuclear arsenals and capability, Simbulan wrote in his Aug. 9 commentary ("Nuclear dissimulation"). Ironically, they do not castigate countries that have long been testing nuclear weapons, such as the United States, Russia,



Intercontinental ballistic missile
US AIR FORCE PHOTO/JOE DAVILA

China, and Israel.

The *Inquirer* published the piece two weeks before the scheduled test-firing of intercontinental ballistic missiles by the United States into the Pacific Ocean. The target was the Ronald Reagan Missile Test Range in Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands in the South Pacific.

Simbulan also discussed the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty (SEA-NWFZT) signed in 1995. The Philippines, along with other members of the

TRIPLE CHEERS OF THE MONTH

Unmasking the Arroyos

CHEERS TO the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) and VERA Files for their hard-hitting series about the largely unexplained wealth of the Arroyos, their hidden properties, and interests.

A three-part series of PCIJ probed the rapid accumulation of the Arroyos' wealth, which is growing faster, and is much bigger, than the combined growth in the declared wealth of three presidents that preceded her. ("Can President Arroyo explain her wealth? Gloria gets richer fastest, beats Cory, Ramos, Erap", <http://www.pcij.org/stories/2009/arroyo-wealth.html>, Aug. 9)

Since she assumed the presidency in 2001, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's declared net worth is now "20 times more than her lawful gross salary as president of only P45,000 a month," PCIJ reported. Her Statements of Assets and Liabilities and Net Worth (SALN), however, do not explain the spike in her declared wealth or if she has other lawful sources of income.

The second part probed the purchase from the Arroyos of a piece of land in Bulacan. ("Gov't spends P45M on road to lot Arroyo sold for P42M", <http://www.pcij.org/stories/2009/arroyo-wealth3.html>, Aug. 10) The Arroyos sold the 2.9-hectare property for almost P41.5 million, or 400 times what they paid for it in 1996 and eight times higher than the lot's recorded fair market value. PCIJ research found that five government road projects worth P44.8 million had been implemented where the Arroyo lot was located, indicating a possible case of conflict of interest.

Part three of PCIJ's series further probed Arroyo's unexplained wealth, including her numerous real estate properties. ("Gloria's mysterious millions: Stacks of stocks, sparse data", <http://www.pcij.org/stories/2009/arroyo-wealth4.html>, Aug. 11)

VERA Files, meanwhile, reported the existence of the house of presidential son and Pampanga Rep. Juan Miguel "Mikey" Arroyo in the United States which he had not declared in



Arroyos

LITO OCAMPO

his SALNs. VERA Files reported that both Mikey and brother, Camarines Sur Rep. Diosdado Ignacio "Dato" Arroyo, acquired houses and local business interests in the United States after winning seats in Congress. ("Arroyo sons acquire U.S. homes, businesses after election to Congress", <http://www.verafiles.org/index.php/focus/315-arroyo-sons-acquire-us-homes-businesses-after-election-to-congress>, Aug. 30)

Mikey bought a house in California and transferred the title to his wife in 2006. The house, now up for sale and worth \$1.32 million or P63.7 million, did not appear in Mikey's 2007 and 2008 SALNs. Dato and his wife also bought a P26.7-million property in San Francisco in 2007. Dato, unlike Mikey, declared ownership of the property in his 2008 SALN.

A follow-up VERA Files report last Sept. 6 found out that Mikey failed to declare to the Commission on Elections campaign contributions that he had received for the last two congressional elections. ("Following the Mikey trail: 2004, 2007 declarations show no campaign contributions", <http://www.verafiles.org/index.php/focus/327-following-the-mikey-trail-2004-2007-declarations-show-no-campaign-contributions>) Mikey earlier said on national television that his declared net worth jumped from P5.7 million in 2001 to P74.4 million in 2004 and P99.2 million in 2007 partly because of campaign contributions and wedding gifts. Mikey wed his second cousin Angela in 2002.

His statements of contributions and expenses in the 2004 and 2007 elections, however, did not list any campaign donations, according to VERA Files. The law mandates candidates

declare contributions in all forms and amounts by donors.

Another PCIJ story, "For Charity, Vanity, Whatever? Arroyos run a horde of foundations", reported how members of the First Family as well as relatives and supporters have numerous foundations and non-governmental organizations (<http://www.pcij.org/stories/2009/arroyo-foundations.html>, Sept. 8). Some of these foundations "were at front and center of the so-called 'fertilizer fund scam' that saw millions of pesos meant to buy fertilizer for farmers released to foundations just a few weeks before the 2004 elections." Most of these organizations, according to PCIJ, did not apply for Philippine Council for NGO Certification accreditation. In addition, all these organizations apparently failed to publicly disclose their sources of funding as well as their projects.



LITO OCAMPO

Pro-active election coverage

CHEERS TO ANC for reminding the public of the high stakes in the upcoming 2010 elections. ABS-CBN 2's sister channel has been pro-active in airing live programs that focus on the issues in next year's elections. One example was its airing live last Sept. 21 a forum on poll automation, including a presentation on the process during election day using precinct count optical scan machines (PCOS).

The 90-minute "ANC Presents: A 2010 Poll Automation" forum discussed questions regarding poll automation, especially the reliability of PCOS machines to count, transmit, and canvass votes. Representatives from Smartmatic and Total Information Management presented how a PCOS machine will be used during election day.

Previously, ANC aired live fora with presidential candidates. ■



CHEERS

MONITOR

JEERS



Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), signed the treaty declaring the region a nuclear weapons-free zone. Simbulan suggested measures that will “enforce and implement the spirit and letter of the treaty and put more muscle into the SEA-NWFZT Commission which ASEAN established a few years ago in Manila.”

Simbulan is a University of the Philippines professor and a senior fellow at the Center for People Empowerment in Governance.

In disguise



JEERS TO *Sunday Inquirer Magazine* for publishing a political advertisement thinly disguised as a feature article on Sen. Loren Legarda last Aug. 30. The cover story, with the title “Sen. Loren Legarda, Eyeing a Green Presidency”, hit two birds with one stone: first, it declared Legarda’s bid for presidency and second, it distinguished her brand from everyone else. “With climate change threatening the basic human rights of the people...Legarda is all the more motivated to take up the cudgels and lead the country to a safer and more secure future,” the article went.

A mid-shot of a smiling Legarda figured at the cover, while the article itself ran for two full pages, occupying the magazine’s centerfold.

The Fair Elections Act, however, requires that “print advertisements shall not exceed one-fourth (1/4) page in broadsheet and one-half (1/2) page in tabloids thrice a week per newspaper, magazine or other publications.” It also prohibits early campaigning, political advertising, and any “partisan political activity” that aims to solicit votes and support for a candidate when outside the campaign period. The election period, according to the Commission on Elections, is from Feb. 9, 2010 until May 8, 2010.

But it’s not only the *Sunday Inquirer Magazine* that’s abetting the violation of the law. Other publications are equally guilty.

No attention



JEERS TO the *Manila Bulletin* for its perfunctory reporting of government efforts to mitigate the crisis in Mindanao. Last Sept. 4, the *Bulletin* failed to give adequate space and explanation to a story that warranted national attention, especially because local and international human rights organizations have already declared the

situation “critical”. “Hand-in-hand, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), local government units (LGUs), Philippine National Red Cross, and other concerned government agencies and non-government organizations helped the affected persons or families,” the paper reported. (“Gov’t aids 100,000 crisis victims”)

However, there was no mention of the causes behind the displacement and dislocation of thousands in Mindanao, some of them from indigenous groups, or of their conditions. Despite the magnitude of the crisis, the story occupied a small space at the back page. The article should have mentioned that the crisis was largely the outcome of conflict—the majority of the evacuees left their communities when government troops arrived to occupy the area. Other important details were also missing, such as the evacuation centers, the conflict-ridden areas, as well as quotes from the actual evacuees themselves.

Lost in translation



JEERS TO the *Manila Bulletin* for misinformation. On Sept. 7, a three-paragraph report was headlined “Bangit sees decisive end to insurgency”. Yet, a close reading of the article will reveal that there were no quotes from Lt. Gen. Delfin Bangit that mentioned the “insurgency”. He merely addressed the army field commanders at a seminar-workshop and leader’s symposium, saying: “Be shining examples of discipline, professionalism, and positive values and practices not just to our troops, but to members of your respective communities. As you exemplify good values in your deeds, we can win hearts and minds.”

Wreck



JEERS TO *The Daily Tribune* for hyping its report on Aug. 27, “Palace, race foes out to unite against Erap as star rises”. The article was largely based on unfounded speculations from a single source.

The article states that presidential administration and opposition bets are planning to unite against former president and convicted plunderer Joseph “Erap” Estrada because they are bent on “engaging in character assassination against the deposed leader.” The report called the alliance of opposition and administration contenders as the “wrecking crew”.

The report further speculated that the revival of the double

murder case of Bubby Dacer and Emmanuel Corbito, in which Estrada is implicated, is part of the “wrecking crew’s” grand plan.

While it is basic to journalism to have multiple sources especially when there is controversial information, the *Tribune* article only had a single source: Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago. ■



Singson

LITO OCAMPO

Perpetuating biases and prejudices



JEERS TO *Teledyaryo’s “Editorial ng Bayan* (The People’s Editorial)” segment last Sept. 9 that was biased for Deputy National Security Adviser Luis “Chavit” Singson regarding his alleged beating of former partner Rachel “Che” Tiongson.

Tiongson had told the media that she had long been separated from Singson before she went out with someone else. She filed charges against the former governor for physical abuse. But Singson denied that they’re separated and even added that Tiongson should have been thankful that he didn’t kill her for cheating on him. Tiongson withdrew her civil case against Singson last Sept. 30.

The opinions of commentator Rafael Dante Cruz displayed skewed views which supported the statements of Singson, who is a known Malacañang ally. Not only was this segment biased, it also reeked of sexism.

Cruz asked “...babae lamang daw ba ang dapat bigyan ng proteksyon, eh paano na ang matatagong mga lalaki? ‘Di ba meron din silang dangal at karangalan na dapat pangalagaan?’ (Should protection only be given to women, what about macho men? Don’t they have their dignity and honor to protect as well)?”

He added, “*Naiwansi Singson, sugatan ang puso at buong pagkatao. Tama, dapat na mahalin ang kababaihan. Ito’y larawan ng ating butiing ina. Pero depende naman siguro sa klase ng mga babae, hindi babaeng halip-*

arot, hindi ang namamangka sa dalawa o tatlong ilog. Ang gani-tong uri ng mga babae ay dapat na malunod sa sariling ilog ng kabaliwan (Singson was left with a wounded heart and being. It’s right to love women. They are the picture of our beloved mothers. But this depends on the character of the women, not those who are flirtatious, not those who relate to several men at the same time. These kinds of women should drown in their own madness).” ■



Aquino

LITO OCAMPO

A rare peek



CHEERS TO *Newsbreak* for its nine-part series on how second cousins and 2010 presidential candidates Gilberto Cojuangco Teodoro (of Lakas-Kampi-CMD) and Benigno Cojuangco Aquino III (of the Liberal Party) ended up as political rivals. The series traced the history of the Cojuangcos, one of the most influential families in Philippine politics and business.

With the series, *Newsbreak* gave Filipinos a glimpse of the dynamics and dynastic character of Philippine politics.

The series was based on “Family Feud”, the second chapter of the book “Boss Danding” by Earl G. Parreño. The series ran from Sept. 21 to Oct. 2. Danding is the politically influential business tycoon Eduardo Cojuangco Jr., uncle of both Teodoro and Aquino.

Full participation



CHEERS TO *Bulatlat* for a timely examination of Philippine democracy and elections. Benjie Oliveros, in his analysis “Name Recall, The Folly in Philippine Elections”, states why name recall alone can clinch victory for any political contender, even in the utter lack of platform and substance.

The article also cited the failings of various institutions, in-

cluding the media, for the flawed system of democracy, in which voting “is the only expression of the people’s sovereign will and participation in governance.” But voting, Oliveros asserts, should not constitute all of the people’s political participation. “It should only complement direct political action by a people asserting their sovereign will.”

Roots of the Mindanao conflict



CHEERS TO *MindaNews* for providing consistent coverage on the developments of the peace process in Mindanao, especially the peace talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

One article by *MindaNews* columnist Patricio Diaz discussed in a three-part series the history of the so-called Mindanao conflict; the struggle for Muslim autonomy; and the renewed efforts for peace after the failed signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain in 2008 (published on Sept. 12, Sept. 17, and Sept. 21 in Diaz’s column “Comment”).

Diaz’s article “Pride Chicken and Peace” was on how pride played a major role in the Mindanao conflict. The first article showed how that pride “aggravated” the fight over politics and land ownership in Mindanao and “fueled” the ongoing violence between some Muslims and Christians.

The second part discussed the “three phases of Muslim autonomy”—the creation of Regional Autonomous Governments IX and XII under the Marcos administration, the creation of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in 1989, and the reorganization of ARMM in 1996—while the third part looked into how local leaders in Mindanao are trying to influence the ongoing peace negotiations between the government and the MILF.

‘Market failure’



CHEERS TO *GMA News.TV* for its Sept. 15 special report on why medicine remains inaccessible to many Filipinos, especially the poor (“For profitable RP drug industry, price cut is a pill that’s hard to swallow”, http://www.gmanews.tv/story/172359/for-profitable-rp-drug-industry-price-cut-is-a-pill-thats-hard-to-swallow/_/2/). The report cited “lack of competition” in the drug industry as one reason behind it. ■

Peddling shoddy goods

The range of TV programs is very narrow, consisting of local and foreign soap operas, game shows, canned foreign cartoon shows that have been dubbed in Filipino, and noontime shows

■ By Edsel Van DT. Dura with reports from Alaysa Tagumpay E. Escandor

IDIOCY PERVADES the airwaves these days, no thanks to television stations that perpetually peddle cheap entertainment.

PJR Reports watched all the programs of ABS-CBN 2 and GMA-7 in one day (July 15), from sign-on to sign-off.

The monitor confirmed something the public has long suspected: the dominance of entertainment programs in the offerings of rival channels ABS-CBN 2 and GMA-7. And it's the kind of entertainment that is shrill, banal, and senseless.

The range of programs is also very narrow, consisting of local and foreign soap operas, game shows, canned foreign cartoon shows that have been dubbed in Filipino, and noontime shows. What's wrong with this picture? The undeniable focus by the television networks on entertainment diverts people's attention to matters that are of little or no importance.

Noontime shows *Wowowee* and *Eat Bulaga*, the climax of local TV programming, are especially popular for the promise of instant cash, the giddy hosts, and bouncing female dancers.

Furthermore, the shows have often been criticized for promoting a culture of mendicancy and apathy among its viewers.

"Shows like these offer a way out of poverty through the magic, the razzmatazz of television. Never mind hard work or social reforms. The key lies in the luck of the draw, the promise of salvation provided by a celebrity entertainer," said journalist Sheila Coronel in her Feb. 9, 2006 speech "*Wowowee: Television and the perils of peddling dreams*" at the wake of the Ultra tragedy on Feb. 4, 2006 that killed 71 people and injured more than a hundred others.

"Is it any wonder that the following of TV programs like *Wowowee* resembles that of a messianic cult? And isn't Willie Revillame (*Wowowee* host) some sort of messiah of the idiot box?" added Coronel, who is currently

director of the Tony Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism of New York's Columbia University.

Charges of reckless imprudence resulting in multiple homicide and multiple physical injuries were filed against the top executives of ABS-CBN 2 by the National Bureau of Investigation in March 2006, but until now the case is yet to be resolved. (see related story)

Indeed, the "idiot box" tag often used to describe TV is only too well justified by its entertainment programming.

Ratings war

TV entertainment shows are apparently produced for no other reason than that they're likely to rate by appealing to the lowest common denominator. And TV ratings determine where advertisers will put their money.

"The numbers, however, don't provide qualitative information such as what makes a program popular, or why audiences are watching it.... This leaves the networks second-guessing their audiences' tastes," Luz Rimban, a member of the Board of Trustees of the investigative journalism group VERA Files, wrote in "TV Wars: Not Without Danger" in the Dec. 2002 issue of the *Philippine Journalism Review*.

"And this is where the danger lurks: in the absence of a swift, precise and definable mechanism that could provide the whys that numbers can't supply, networks and advertisers (simply) equate high ratings with audience approval," Rimban added.

While trying to outdo each other, what the two major TV stations actually accomplish is to copy and imitate the other. The result is a homogeneity of con-

tent, themes, treatment, plot, and programs. For instance, telenovelas in both stations have romance as dominant theme, portraying the timeworn concept of damsels in distress and the men who save them.

Most of these telenovelas are unoriginal as they are adapted from comic strips, pocketbooks, films or from foreign programs. These include ABS-CBN 2's *Kambal sa Uma*, *Precious Hearts Romances*, *Maria De Jesus*, *Boys Over Flowers*, and *Only You*. Similar GMA-7 shows include *Ngayon at Kailanman*, *Kung Aagawin Mo ang Lahat sa Akin*, *Zorro*, *La Lola*, and *Rosalinda*.

Is there really a public fascination for programs about twins that the two biggest stations try to outcrass the other on this? If ABS-CBN 2 has *Kambal sa Uma*, a show about twin sisters who do not look alike but share the physical features of a rodent, GMA-7 also has twin sisters whose only similar features are their big noses in the show *Kambalilong*. ABS-CBN 2 also has a canned foreign "telenovela" in the morning, the *Amazing Twins*.

The telenovelas take up on the average 20 percent of the program schedules of the stations. But telenovelas do not make up for the



Photos by LITO OCAMPO



ABS-CBN 2 Program Schedule on July 15

Program Schedule	Category	Percentage of Total Time
04:30 am DZMM TeleRadyo (45 mins)	News	3.8%
05:15 am Kape't Pandesal (15 mins)	Entertainment (Evangelical)	1.27%
5:30 am Umagang Kay Ganda (3 hrs)	News Magazine	15.19%
08:30 am Amazing Twins (35 mins)	Entertainment (Syndicated)	2.95%
09:05 am Blue Dragon (20 mins)	Entertainment (Children's show)	1.69%
09:25 am Naruto (20 mins)	Entertainment (Children's show)	1.69%
09:45 am Ang Pangarap ni Cosette (35 mins)	Entertainment (Children's show)	2.95%
10:20 am Ruffa & Ai (1 hr)	Entertainment (Talk show)	5.06%
11:20 am Pilipinas Game KNB? (55 mins)	Entertainment (Game show)	4.64%
12:15 pm Wowowee (2 hrs, 55 mins)	Entertainment (Variety show)	14.77%
03:10 pm Kambal Sa Uma (25 mins)	Entertainment (Drama)	2.11%
03:35 pm Precious Hearts Romances (35 mins)	Entertainment (Drama)	2.95%
04:10 pm Maria De Jesus (40 mins)	Entertainment (Drama)	3.38%
04:50 pm Mr. Bean (20 mins)	Entertainment (Comedy)	1.69%
05:10 pm Uncle Max (15 mins)	Entertainment (Syndicated)	1.27%
05:25 pm Miss No Good (35 mins)	Entertainment (Syndicated)	2.95%
05:55 pm Boys Over Flowers (35 mins)	Entertainment (Syndicated)	2.95%
06:30 pm TV Patrol World (1 hr, 15 mins)	News	6.33%
07:45 pm May Bukas Pa (45 mins)	Entertainment (Drama)	3.8%
08:30 pm Only You (45 mins)	Entertainment (Drama)	3.8%
09:15 pm Tayong Dalawa (30 mins)	Entertainment (Drama)	2.53%
09:45 pm The Wedding (30 mins)	Entertainment (Drama)	2.53%
10:15 pm Showbiz News Ngayon (45 mins)	Entertainment Magazine	3.8%
11:00 pm Bandila (30 mins)	News	2.53%
11:30 pm Probe (40 mins)	Public Affairs (Blocktimer)	3.38%
Total Time: 19 hours, 45 mins		100%

entire entertainment programs of GMA-7 and ABS-CBN 2 which take the lion's share in airtime, an estimated 70 percent, as opposed to the 30 percent allotted for news and public affairs programs.

However, the 30 percent exceeds the 30 minutes of daily newscast required by the 2007 Broadcast Code of the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP/Association of Broadcasters of the Philippines).

This may look like good news but it should not overshadow the fact that the abundance of entertainment programs means a shortfall in information.

For example, television networks are required to allot at least 15 percent of daily airtime "suitable for viewing for children" (Art. 11, Sec. 2 of the KBP Broadcast Code). Based on the *PJR Reports* monitor, these programs are all canned foreign cartoon series. The question is do these types of cartoon shows "contribute to the sound and balanced development of children" (Art. 11, Sec. 3) and do they "complement what children learn from school" (Art. 11, Sec. 7), among others.

And while there is more airtime given to news and public affairs than required, it doesn't remedy the problematic blurring of lines between news and en-



tertainment that's happening in broadcast news today.

"The rush to score a scoop, the inordinate focus on crimes of passion, sex and violence, the flood of gossip that passes for entertainment news (often generated by the networks to promote their stars), the mercenary melding of information and entertainment ("infotainment")—these seem to have removed broadcast journalism from the business of presenting the relevant truth," Lito Zulueta said in "Jay: Censuring TV 'infotainment'", http://www.manunuri.com/reviews/jay_censuring_tv_infotainment. Zulueta is an editor and editorial writer of

the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*.

Self-regulation

This is not to say that the broadcast media are not regulated. Member-broadcast stations must adhere to certain guidelines stipulated in the 2007 KBP Broadcast Code.

Complaints about violations of the Broadcast Code may originate from the public or from KBP's own monitoring. The KBP Standards Authority, which is composed of 13 members appointed by the KBP Board of Directors, serves as the complaints board of the broadcast media.

In addition, there are also gov-

■ STILL RAKING IT IN ■

■ By Aloysa Tagumpay E. Escandor

IT HAS been three years since the *Wowowee* tragedy, in which 74 people, most of them elderly, died, and hundreds were injured. The show supposedly generated a lot of soul-searching within the television, and in general, media industry. Many concluded that, with the current thrust of Philippine television, the *Wowowee* tragedy was merely waiting to happen.

Over 40,000 Filipinos, some of them from the most isolated islands in the country, camped for days outside the PhilSports Stadium (also known as Ultra) in the fervent hopes of becoming instant millionaires. The stampede that followed was harrowing, in one sense because the incident was a reflection of how the media responded to, even capitalized on, the ills of the country. For all its claims at helping the poor, the game show can't propose solutions to the widespread misery that motivates many to watch and, if lucky, participate in the program.

There were, of course, resolutions, with the ABS-CBN 2 management displaying some degree of willingness for a change in programming and thrust. The public discussion that followed was productive if only because academics, journalists, media practitioners, businesspeople, and individuals came together to reflect on the tragedy, and raised hitherto taboo questions.

The consensus was that television's emphasis on entertainment was a key problem—and it's the kind of entertainment that peddles escapist dreams of romance and wealth to entice a people mired in poverty into tuning in. Game-shows such as *Wowowee* take up most of broadcast time, while not enough time is given to news and current affairs. Next to *Umagang Kay Ganda*, *Wowowee* still took up around 15 percent of daily program time, with hardly any change in the format of the show.

Despite the Children's Television Act of 1997, which requires that a minimum of 15 percent of daily broadcast time be allotted for children's shows, there are few programs that aimed at educating children outside the school. Violence, crime, and sex still dominate air time. And profit is still the singular driving determinant of broadcast programs.

Children's shows accounted for a mere nine percent of total broadcast time, a far cry from the 15 percent required by law. In 2001, a study by the Children's Television Foundation found that 50 percent of television shows—364 over 728 television shows contained themes of aggression. The same still holds true today.

Meanwhile, for all the wringing of hands that went on when the Ultra tragedy killed 74 people, *Wowowee* is still airing—and raking it in. ■



GMA-7 Program Schedule (July 15, 2009)

Program Schedule	Category	Percentage of Total Time
04:30 am Reporter's Notebook (45 mins)	Public Affairs (Replay)	2.23%
05:15 am Unang Hirit (3 hrs, 25 mins)	News Magazine	16.13%
08:40 am Pokémon (25 mins)	Entertainment (Children's show)	1.24%
09:05 am Jackie Chan Adventures (20 mins)	Entertainment (Children's show)	.99%
09:25 am Buzzer Beater (20 mins)	Entertainment (Children's show)	.99%
09:45 am Hunter X Hunter (30 mins)	Entertainment (Children's show)	1.49%
10:15 am Johnson's Mommy Diary (10 mins)	Entertainment (Talk show)	.50%
10:25 am SiS (1 hr)	Entertainment (Talk Show)	4.96%
11:25 am La Lola (30 mins)	Entertainment (Syndicated)	1.49%
12:05 pm Eat Bulaga (2 hr, 5 mins)	Entertainment (Variety show)	10.17%
02:10 pm Daisy Siete: Kambalilong (50 mins)	Entertainment (Drama)	2.49%
3:00 pm Ngayon at Kailanman (45 mins)	Entertainment (Drama)	2.23%
03:45 pm Kung Aagawin Mo ang Lahat sa Akin (45 mins)	Entertainment (Drama)	2.23%
04:30 pm Chi Princesses (30 mins)	Entertainment (Syndicated)	1.49%
05:00 pm Hole in the Wall (35 mins)	Entertainment (Game show)	1.74%
05:35 pm All My Life (40 mins)	Entertainment (Drama)	1.99%
06:15 pm 24 Oras (1 hr, 25 mins)	News	6.20%
07:40 pm Zorro (45 mins)	Entertainment (Drama)	2.23%
08:25 pm Rosalinda (45 mins)	Entertainment (Drama)	2.23%
09:10 pm Adik Sa'yo (45 mins)	Entertainment (Drama)	2.23%
09:55 pm Cruel Love (45 mins)	Entertainment (Drama)	2.23%
10:40 pm Wow Hayop (30 mins)	Entertainment	1.49%
11:10 pm Saksi (30 mins)	News	1.49%
11:40 pm Born To Be Wild (35 mins)	Public Affairs	1.74%
Total Time: 20 hours, 15 mins		100%

ernment regulating agencies like the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB) and the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC).

The NTC, which supervises the allocation and use of broadcast frequencies, uses the KBP Broadcast Code in implementing program rules and regulations. The MTRCB, an agency under the Office of the President, can suspend TV programs for violation of any law and also rate TV programs.

"Unfortunately, these mechanisms have proven inadequate to discipline erring members of the media community. Tedious and cumbersome, they are often observed in the breach," Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) executive director Melinda Quintos De Jesus wrote in a conference paper titled "The Broadcast Media: Public Information or Entertainment?"

Can the broadcast media effectively self-regulate when the present codes of conduct are erratically followed? It comes as no surprise that some lawmakers are pushing for government intervention in media through such measures as the Right of Reply bills,

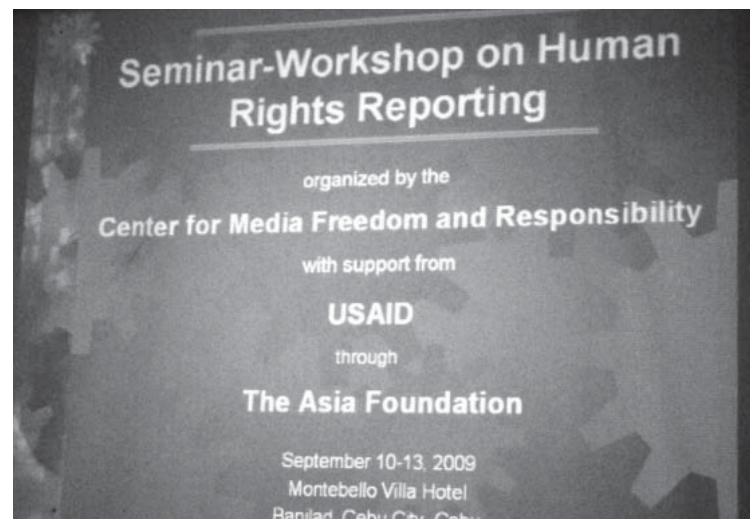
which would compel broadcast stations to give airtime to anyone aggrieved by the media.

But government intervention is not the solution to the weaknesses of self-regulation. What is missing in the equation of media self-regulation is a public that is media literate and militant enough to demand from broadcast stations to adhere to its own standards by providing "a varied, well-rounded and comprehensive service of information, education, and entertainment for audiences of different ages, interests, and tastes," according to the Broadcast Code of the Philippines (Sections 36 to 41).

"With the support and advice of practitioners' groups, a media literacy program as a means to develop a public that can help strengthen the capacity of the media to regulate themselves can be developed, planned and implemented by media organizations themselves; by journalism and communication schools; by media advocacy groups; and by non-governmental organizations," Luis Teodoro, deputy director of CMFR, wrote in "Watching the Watchdog: Media Self-Regulation in Southeast Asia". ■

Human Rights Reportage Revisited

Making the voiceless heard and helping protect the vulnerable is both a human and journalistic duty



■ By Kathryn Roja G. Raymundo

THE RECENT surge in human rights violations and abuses has aroused renewed interest on the issues involved. The media as well as various individuals and groups have described the worsening situation as equal to if not surpassing the repression and state of terror during the Martial Law years.

Human rights reporting is not new in the Philippines. The human rights situation during the Marcos administration had led the alternative media to focus on human rights. But after the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, much of the media lost interest in it. To-

day, the mainstream media have again taken notice of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, the killing of journalists, and the attacks on migrants, women, children, and indigenous peoples' rights. The current reporting has been erratic and often without

context, however, despite the media's emerging appreciation of the relevance of the issue.

In a country supposedly familiar with human rights violations and abuses, it is the obligation of every citizen to understand human rights. The media are indispensable in this process, and making the voiceless heard and helping protect the vulnerable is both a human and journalistic duty.

CMFR seminar-workshop

As part of its effort to provide continuing education for journalists, the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) organized, with support from the USAID through The Asia Foundation, the "Seminar-workshop on Human Rights Reporting" held

from Sept. 10 to 13 in Cebu City. Twenty-eight print, broadcast and online journalists from Visayas and Mindanao participated.

CMFR Executive Director Melinda Quintos de Jesus said the seminar-workshop was meant to "raise the capacity of journalists to write more and better human rights stories."

The seminar provided basic information about national and international laws, covenants, and protocols that deal with human rights; the contexts in which human rights are exercised, limited, or violated in the Philippines; and panel discussions on the different aspects of human rights reporting. It ended with a workshop in which the participants were asked to put this all into practice.



Seminar-workshop participants, speakers and organizers

Photos by KATHRYN ROJA G. RAYMUNDO



De Jesus added: "We hope that with some bit of training, we can help you to present with greater awareness the HR issues involved. With this kind of journalistic orientation, news reporting can actually make citizens and government officials more aware and more sensitive about the protection of human rights."

Journalist's duty

The weaknesses of human rights reporting are the same as those that besiege other areas of news coverage: unverified information, lack of context, and sensationalism. There is also the tendency to misrepresent sectors and to leave the motives and causes of the violations unquestioned.

The participating journalists acknowledged the vulnerabilities and faults of the press. They cited a number of reasons why news organizations and journalists find it difficult to consistently cover human rights issues and to improve their news coverage.

They found human rights reporting to be complicated and tricky. Aside from the problems caused by the media outlets' adherence to conventional news values, the participants noted the organizational policies that limit their reporting to well-tried formulae, their own biases which interfere with the way they present their reports, and their commitments or advocacies which compete with the interests of their employers.

As the world changes, news organizations and journalists are expected to keep up. The press cannot afford to sit back and keep doing the same stories it has been doing. The stories may remain in some ways the same, but there are also many things that make the events today different.

In reporting human rights, journalists need to make sure that they keep up with the changing context of the issues. *Aksyon Radyo Bacolod* (Action Radio

In reporting human rights, journalists need to make sure that they keep up with the changing context of the issues

Bacolod) reporter Julius Mariveles said "To whom much is given, much is required....I believe we (journalists) are supposed to be advocates and defenders of rights." With the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression and of the press, the media have the accountability to ensure that these rights are exercised in the service of the public.

Walter Balane of *MindaNews* said that journalists do not always have to be in an adversarial, combative mode; well-written reports and their effective presentation can actually encourage leaders, sectors, and the public to act better. "Our primary job is to report, but we also need to educate."

CMFR Deputy Director Luis Teodoro said: "It is part of the journalist's duty to report and explain the particularities of the human condition. Reporting and explaining the bad helps change it. Reporting the good helps encourage it."

In their expert opinion

The resource persons at the seminar-workshop included professionals, academics, and leaders of civil society organizations which support the promotion of human rights.

The program allowed these experts to evaluate the current coverage of human rights in their respective fields as well as suggest



Mariveles (center)



Balane

ways on how to report the different aspects of human rights.

Miriam Coronel Ferrer, who is a leading convenor of Sulong CAR-HRIHL (Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law) and a political science professor at the University of the Philippines (UP), discussed the context of human rights during times of conflict. She suggested that stories should be framed keeping in mind

Center, handled the panel on gender and media. Sobritchea said there are three things to remember in reporting about women: respect, protect, and engage.

She said respect includes verifying the accuracy of information and avoiding the use of stereotypes and sensational presentations. Journalists have the obligation to protect women from harm and danger. Lastly, she reminded the participants that it is also important for the media to promote gender equality.

The last panel discussion was on reporting the rights of migrants and minorities.

Ma. Nieves Confesor, a core faculty member and executive director at the Asian Institute of Management Team Energy, Center for Bridging Societal Divide, explained the terms of confusion in the issues of migration and what a rights-based approach to migration means: migration in conditions of dignity, equity, justice and security and not just "safe migration".

Vice chair and managing trustee of INCITEGov Teresita Quintos Deles shared the story of indigenous peoples and how the media have covered their concerns over the years. She asked the participants to remember "three Cs": context, characters and interests, and consequences.

Together with De Jesus and Teodoro, *MindaNews* editor Carolyn Arguillas facilitated and critiqued the workshop outputs. The participants wrote news stories on human rights using the knowledge shared during the panel discussions, the presentations of the speakers, and session handouts. ■

the constitutional imperatives and provisions as well as international treaties and conventions. She also encouraged journalists to do CAR-HRIHL-based war reporting.

Ferrer said media outlets could use discourse analysis to understand what type of messages they communicate to the public: what is being said or not; what are the underlying premises in what is being said; the choice of words and images; and the use of language.

Sophia Flor Perez-Garduce, spokesperson of SALINLAHI Alliance for Children's Concerns, discussed human rights violations against minors. She also highlighted the good practices of media in reporting the children's rights: exposing/calling attention to cases of rights violations; coverage that contributes to child protection and to policy review and formulation; and enhancing public awareness.

Another UP professor, Carolyn Israel Sobritchea of the UP Asian

LESS THAN PERFECT REPORTING

From page 1

River continues to swell to record proportions.

In all three places—Arayat, Tat-alon, and Provident—rescue efforts came too late, if at all.

While all the above was happening, defense secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr., chair of the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC), makes one of his first public appearances after the storm's initial deluge to explain why rescue efforts were sluggish by saying that NDCC had only "more or less 25" rescue boats for the metropolis's 11-million population.

During Teodoro's press conference, hundreds had already left their homes. Television footage shows people from inundated communities wading through water that seems more swamp than flood. The images seem surreal because, for one, the severity of the storm was not anticipated, catching many unaware. The rampaging water left people in terror, the streets impassable, whole communities submerged. The heavens, it seemed, had put a curse on the land.

This was tropical storm Ondoy (international code name Ketsana), whose rains on Sept. 25 to 26 were unlike any the country has seen in four decades. Initially, most thought the storm would be like any other, in which damage was inevitable but manageable. But Ondoy dumped more rain in six to eight hours than the standard amount Metro Manila receives in a month, resulting in a disaster that stunned the entire country and even the international community.

Just four hours after Ondoy's actual landfall, the rainfall had peaked at 90 millimeters; compare that to the country's average daily rainfall of only 11.3 millimeters. Combined with the southwest monsoon, the storm wreaked the worst possible damage on eight of the country's regions, affecting close to 500,000 persons.

From Sept. 24 to Oct. 6, *PJR Reports* monitored reports from television, print, and selected online sites on tropical storm Ondoy and the trajectory of events resulting from the storm. The reports monitored were from GMA-7's *24 Oras* and *Kapuso Mo, Jessica Soho*, ABS-CBN 2's *TV Patrol World* and *Bandida*; newspapers *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *Manila Bulletin*, and *The*

Philippine Star; and news web sites *Newsbreak*, *Philstar.com*, *Mb.com.ph*, *Inquirer.net*, *Bulatlat*, *Pinoy Weekly*, and *abs-cbnNEWS*.

Deaths and losses

The findings of *PJR Reports* shared that the bulk of the news concentrated on crushing stories of death and loss. Ondoy, and the devastation that came with it, was the topic of headlines and primetime news for over a week, and as of this writing was still on the front pages.

Right at the onset of the flood, media followed the mass migration of people from submerged communities to evacuation centers. The reports were helpful, especially in the first critical hours of rescue operations, when the absence of any disaster preparedness plan or even a comprehensive map of flood-prone areas in the metropolis was most palpable. Thus, the accounts helped give a rough sketch of which areas were affected, which communities had to be prioritized in rescue and relief operations, and what was lacking in the government response.

The news organizations closely followed the actions of the president, local authorities, local government units, and national government agencies, especially the following: the NDCC, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA); the Department of Social Welfare and Development; the Department of Health; and the Department of Agriculture.

The press religiously reported the number of casualties, the damage to property and agricultural produce, the number of evacuees and evacuation centers, health and sanitation conditions in the evacuation centers, the amount of calamity funds needed for relief operations, and the donations received.

The efforts of media to penetrate flooded areas were commendable, even heroic. "There are only two rubber boats. They took a long time to return," a GMA-7 news cameraperson reported from Marikina, one of the worst-hit by the storm.

The reporters also asked the tough questions. Upon the prodding of a reporter from *TV Patrol*, Teodoro had to explain why, more than 10 hours after Ondoy's landfall, rescue efforts had yet to reach affected areas. "Res-



cuers were initially assigned to their respective areas, but later had to be diverted to Marikina, Cavite, Pasig," Teodoro said in Filipino.

What was the anticipated number of persons affected by the flood? "We do not have the numbers, what we know are the general affected areas: Pasig, Marikina, and Cainta."

NDCC has 25 rubber boats, are these enough? "Not enough," was Teodoro's terse reply.

Sensationalism did prevail at times over sobriety and substance. ANC repeatedly aired, without explanation, a dramatic file footage of a group of people calling for help as they rode across the raging Marikina river. The media also immediately referred to typhoon Pepeng (international code name Parma) as a "super typhoon", forgetting that the cyclone had yet to gain enough intensity to become one.

The media also tended to overindulge in stories of loss, going overboard on the dramatic details and doing too little analysis and investigation. At this writing the Philippine government had received an estimated \$5-million worth of relief assistance. Yet, the government's apparent lack of a disaster preparedness plan should have prompted the press to ask where and how the aid will be spent to help the victims, if it does indeed reach them. In the ensuing coverage, media should also investigate and keep a close eye on the government's use of calamity and emergency funds.

Journalism requires a healthy dose of scrutiny and skepticism, more so given the current administration's blemished record on transparency. What has become



of all the relief aid for the Ondoy victims? What has become of the P2-billion fund that has now been reduced to just P29 million? Add to that the donations from previous years: \$1 million in 2006 for reconstruction and rehabilitation, and \$8.5 million in 2007 for humanitarian aid and disaster preparedness.

The reports did not attempt to make sense of the cacophony of conflicting statements from government especially at the onset of the storm, when both local and national authorities seemed clueless on how to handle the problem. For instance, Press Sec. Cerge Remonde's initial advice was for people to stay within their homes, admonishing those who were out in the streets. In contrast, Quezon City Mayor Feliciano Belmonte told his constituents to leave their homes because it was "common sense" to evacuate as floodwaters rose.

The visible and the dramatic

While the media were close on the heels of government agencies, the efforts of government were hardly scrutinized despite being "reactive, and relief and emergency centered," says Carlos Padolina, deputy director of the Citizens' Disaster Response Center (CDRC). CDRC is a non-governmental organization that promotes community-based disaster management. Government response has been habitually limited to emergency and relief aid, virtually eschewing disaster preparedness and rehabilitation. "It hardly addresses the vulnerabilities of sectors", adds Padolina.

The networks ABS-CBN 2 and GMA-7 were also notorious for undue self-publicity—their efforts at corporate social responsibility were constantly highlighted in each of their own news programs. "*Kapuso*" artists and "*Kapamilya*" celebrities



Photos by LITO OCAMPO



incapable of coping and overcoming its effects, according to the CDRC. Thus, there is an essential difference between disaster and hazard, something which the media have been remiss in pointing out.

Moreover, Padolina says there is a direct correlation between disaster and vulnerability – the more vulnerable a community is, the more susceptible it is to disaster.

Vulnerability pertains to the fundamental weaknesses of the community's socio-economic, political, and cultural system. Two factors contribute to vulnerability. First is the physical and geographical characteristics of the community and the country, which for the Philippines, include being part of the Western Pacific Basin and the Circum-Pacific seismic belt, its being situated between two major tectonic plates (Pacific Plate and Eurasian Plate), with 22 active volcanoes, and experiencing seasonal droughts.

Second is the socio-economic and political situation of the country. Some of the indicators for this include the amount of minimum wage versus cost of living, the social and economic classes in society, the availability of social services, the quality of governance, and policies that address the vulnerability of communities.

During the coverage of Ondoy, it was common for reports to refer to the flood as "the great equalizer" or other such similar phrases, like "*mayaman o mahirap, parehas nasalanta* (both rich and poor were devastated)", as though the flood put everyone on equal economic footing. In *TV Patrol's* Sept. 30 episode, a reporter said, "*Mayaman man o mahirap, hindi ligtas sa mga darating na pag-ulan na dulot ng climate change* (Whether wealthy or poor, no one is safe from the subsequent storms brought by climate change)."

This treatment shows a basic lack of understanding in media regarding the nature of disasters. The "great equalizer" is nothing but a myth for the simple reason that the poor are more vulnerable and thus, less able to cope with disasters than the privileged. "Disaster (is) primarily a question of vulnerability," says the Center for Disaster Preparedness in its book "Citizenry-based and development-oriented disaster response" (2001).

"*Hindi naman tulad ng malling na patas lang ang laban ng mahirap at mayaman sa karanasan ng konsumeristang kasiyahan sa pang-araw-araw, ang pagbaha, bagamat patas na pagdanas ng pagdurusa't pagpapakasakit, ay hindi naman dinadanas sa pang-araw-araw. Dahil sa mismong korapsyon ng pambansang pamunuan, nagiging exceptional ang pagdanas ng pagsalanta ng pinakamalaking baha sa kasaysayan* (Unlike malling where both poor and rich are equally exposed to



In a country so prone to hazards, a firm grasp of Philippine society's vulnerabilities and how they relate to disasters is not only necessary but also expected, especially for media practitioners

.....

the every day experience of a happy consumerism, a flood, despite the similar experience of loss and suffering, does not occur every day. The devastation wrought by the biggest flood in the history of the country is exceptional because of the rampant corruption in the national government)," wrote Prof. Rolando Tolentino, dean of the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication, in an opinion column.

The past 10 years have seen an increase in the frequency of disasters and the number of communities affected by these. What this means is an increase in the vulnerability of Filipinos.

Flooding is the second most frequent type of disaster in the country. The Philippines is in the Western Pacific Basin, where an average of 20 typhoons, five of them destructive, hits the country each year. As early as 1986, the government had undertaken feasibility studies on flooding in Metro Manila, particularly the "Drainage Improvement Plans of Estero de Vitas and Other Catchment Areas", which eventually spurred the "Metro Manila Flood Control Project II" in 1989. These projects and studies, however, barely prevented the Ondoy deluge.

In the 2005 World Disasters Report, the Philippines placed fourth in Asia and fifth in the world in terms of the most number of persons affected by natural disaster—an estimated 9 million people each year. The country is so prone to disaster that, of all nations, it has suffered the most number of natural hazards in the 20th century, says Dr. Guillermo Q. Tabios III of the University of the Philippines National Hydraulics Research Center (UPNHRC) in his presentation last Oct. 6.

Some of the disasters that have become part of collective memory, either by the sheer magnitude of destruction they wrought or by their historical significance, are: the Payatas landslide in 2000, the Mount Pinatubo eruption in 1991, the 1991 flashflood in Ormoc City, and the 1970 typhoon Yoling, whose devastating effect was among the excuses Ferdinand Marcos used to declare Martial Law.

In a country so prone to hazards, a firm grasp of Philippine society's vulnerabilities and how they relate to disasters is not only necessary but also expected, especially for media practitioners. Moreover, journalists should understand the basics of weather and disaster management, which include preparedness, mitigation, relief and response, and rehabilitation.

Community approach needed

Alberto Lim of the Corporate Network for Disaster Response suggests a community-approach to disaster management, in which all stakeholders are participants. The NDCC should spearhead nationwide training for disaster response. To tailor fit the training according to the specific characteristics and vulnerabilities of each locality, the local government must directly handle the training.

In its position paper on the Philippine Disaster Risk Management Act of 2008, CDRC suggests the drafting of a "comprehensive and pro-people disaster management bill" that: one, addresses the root causes of people's vulnerabilities; second, links disaster management with overall development framework; third, focuses not just on emergency and relief but also on pre- and post-calamity phases; and fourth, creates an independent body at the national level and organizes up to the barangay level.

Without a comprehensive disaster management plan in place, more disasters are forthcoming. Already, the flood left by Ondoy has caused a complex web of secondary disasters, such as landslides, problems in sanitation, and epidemic from water-borne diseases.

The ineptness of government, and the poverty of media in disaster coverage, has virtually assured a calamity, wherever and however mild the hazard. The entire country is not only a de facto disaster; it is one constantly waiting to happen. ■

were conspicuously handing relief goods in evacuation centers and still-flooded areas. Upon the on-air coaxing from a newscaster, and to the loud cheering of his studio audience, Willie Revillame of *Wowowee* pledged on-air to donate a million to the victims of Ondoy.

In contrast, grassroots organizations and non-governmental organizations were not given ample media exposure, despite being at the forefront of community-based disaster response and prevention efforts.

Reporting did not move far from what was visible and dramatic. Only the external face of devastation was shown – the most common images of which were loss of life and property. The deeper causes and consequences of the disaster received less media attention.

Whatever happened to the NDCC's Calamities and Disaster Preparedness Plan, the aims of which include drafting a comprehensive policy on mitigating hazards?

Whatever happened to the NDCC's Comprehensive Emergency Management Framework, which requires response units to adhere to the "Golden Hour Principle" – that critical period which spells the difference between safety and disaster?

In the case of Marikina, for example, the time lag between Ondoy's peak rainfall and peak flood was four to 12 hours (CP David, Ph.D., et al. "Peak Flood and Flood

Heights in the Marikina River"). If Marikina residents were evacuated before peak flood, there would have been fewer losses and casualties.

Indeed, disasters could have been avoided altogether had some of the government's flood-control projects materialized. Whatever happened, for instance, to the Metro Manila Flood Control Project II Comprehensive Drainage System, a loan-funded project that "intends to solve the seasonal flooding that occurs especially in Central Manila where the political and socio-economic activities of the entire country is centered"?

Whatever happened to the P4.5-billion Pasig-Marikina River Channel Improvement Project and the P5-billion CAMANAVA (Caloocan, Malabon, Navotas and Valenzuela City) flood control project?

Whatever happened to the P902-million official development assistance for the rehabilitation of Angat Dam, and the construction of a flood-mitigating hydraulic laboratory?

To be fair to the media, some of them did attempt to investigate and provide initial answers, among them the online sites *abs-cbnNEWS* and *Newsbreak*. Their investigation, however, was more the exception than the rule, and has yet to be common practice for media practitioners.

The usual clichés

A disaster results from a hazard that strikes a vulnerable community

MEDIA AND ELECTIONS PRE-CAMPAIGN CAMPAIGNING

Were public funds used to produce and/or air those political ads?

■ By Kathryn Roja G. Raymundo

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS' and other personalities' extensive use of the mass media in recent months not only indicates that the 2010 elections are just around the corner; it also suggests that they will be hotly contested. The people who now regularly appear in the advertisements that are currently tagged as infomercials claim they're just presenting their advocacies. The truth is that they're already asking for votes this early.

It didn't start yesterday. Long before the prescribed campaign period of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), a number of incumbent elected officials and/or known personalities had been publicizing either their agencies' programs or themselves. The COMELEC has said there is nothing illegal about this as the official campaign period has yet to start and the people involved still have to file their certificates of candidacy. Ergo, the commercials should not be classified as campaign ads.

Of course it's a stretch. Not only is premature campaigning the issue. Equally important, if public funds were used to produce and/or air these political ads, then those responsible should be held accountable for using those funds for their private ends.

Some argue that what's of concern is not what kind of funds these officials use or have used. Rather, what is more important is to assure fairness. In an equal playing field, the candidate wins based on qualifications and performance, not because he/she is more capable financially—or has access to public funds because of their incumbency.

PJR Reports monitored the news reports and commentaries on premature campaigning from Aug. 12 to 30, when Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago began a legislative inquiry into the infomercials of several Cabinet secretaries. The monitor included two newspapers (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *The Philippine Star*), four news programs (*TV Patrol World*, *24 Oras*, *GMA Weekend Report*, and *Teledyaryo*), and selected online news organizations.

Where's the context?

As usual, the reporting suffered from lack of context.

As chair of the Senate's economic affairs committee, Santiago invited secretaries Ronaldo Puno, interior and local government;

Francisco Duque III, health; Margarito Teves, finance; Gilberto Teodoro Jr., national defense; Hermogenes Ebdane Jr., public works and highways; Jesli Lapus, education; and Nasser C. Pangandaman, agrarian reform to attend the Senate hearing last Aug. 14 and explain the reasons for and funding of their infomercials. Other invited officials were Vice President Noli de Castro Jr., who heads the Pag-IBIG Fund and chair of the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC), Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR) Chair Ephraim Genuino, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) Dir. Gen. Augusto L. Syjuco Jr., Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) Chair Bayani Fernando, and Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay.

The news reports in both print and TV quoted Santiago as saying: "Unless a person is blind, deaf, or dumb, it is crystal clear that the alleged infomercials of cabinet members are intended to camouflage the violation of the campaign ban, for the simple reason that these cabinet members engage only in such infomercials in the year prior to election year and at no other time, and for no other reason than personal political publicity.... By using public funds, these government officials have the financial mechanism to campaign ahead of others."

Most of these reports also mentioned that Santiago had filed a petition, Supreme Court G.R. No. 184044 (Miriam Defensor Santiago v. COMELEC) seeking an injunction against her fellow senators for their endorsement of such products as detergents and beauty aids.

But the news stories lacked explanations and did little to provide context on campaign spending. Many pointed out that these public officials were circumventing laws and rules on election spending and campaigning. But few dared to explore the question beyond the technicality that the COMELEC's specified campaign period has not begun. Santiago's statements already revealed oth-



Santiago: "By using public funds, these government officials have the financial mechanism to campaign ahead of others."

er possible violations of the law which could have been made the subject of follow-up stories.

In her Aug. 25 privilege speech, Santiago suggested the following to address the premature campaigning issue: abolish appropriations for advertising, prohibit the use of savings and contingent funds for professional services and for advertising agencies, disallow all advertising expenses, encourage the media and civil society organizations to be vigilant, make COMELEC accountable, and for the short term, stop all cabinet officials from airing or publishing infomercials.

Lacking in persistence

To be fair to both print and broadcast, the press did mention some laws which could have been violated by the airing or publishing of the "infomercials". But neither the news reports nor commentaries explained the consequences of breaking these regulations.

For example, the press did not pursue Santiago's statement that Cabinet officials could be violating the provisions of the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act (Republic Act [RA] No. 3019). Money for the said advertisements, some officials claim, came from so-called friends and supporters. Granting that the money for these advertisements came from private funds, Santiago nevertheless said this was a form of accepting gifts.

RA 3019 prohibits officials from "receiving any gift" that "includes the act of accepting directly or indirectly a gift from a person other than a member of the public officer's immediate family, in behalf of himself or of any member of his family or relative within the fourth civil degree, either by consanguinity or affinity, even on the occasion of a family celebration or national festivity like Christmas, if the value of the gift is under the circumstances manifestly excessive."

Santiago also mentioned the following laws the officials responsible could have been violating:

- The Commission on Audit (COA) Circular No. 94-001 dated 1994 which states under Sec. 16.1 the Grounds for Disallowance: "All transactions which are irregular, unnecessary, unconscionable, excessive, and extravagant";
- Art. VI, Sec. 25.6 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution which states: "Discretionary funds appropriated for particular officials shall be disbursed only for public purposes to be supported by appropriate vouchers

and subject to such guidelines as may be prescribed by law"; (24 Oras, Aug. 14) and

- *Batas Pambansa Bilang* 881, Omnibus Election Code of the Philippines, Sec. 80 which states: "It shall be unlawful for any person, whether or not a voter or candidate, or for any party, or association of persons, to engage in an election campaign or partisan political activity except during the campaign period." (24 Oras, Aug. 14)

If the infomercials were meant to inform the public of the programs of the government and thus make it logical to use public funds, then the press should have asked the following: Why is there a need for these officials to be present or at least named in every advertisement? Why not just focus on information dissemination—talk about the programs and nothing else? Why give so much publicity to the department heads rather than demonstrate to the people the strengths of their projects? After all, did the accomplishments of these government agencies come out from one individual's effort or the handiwork of the entire department?

Some news organizations were able to pose these questions; their failure comes in not getting the answers.

Ads don't come cheap. And yet, there is a proliferation of infomercials. For this year alone,

government advertising expenses amounted to more than a P100 million. Regardless if the infomercials were part of the government's campaign, self-funded or sponsored by "friends", this amount is excessive and it would seem that the public doesn't get anything from it.

A study

The students of the Department of Communication Research in the College of Mass Communication, University of the Philip-

pines found that "the increasing exposure of potential candidates through the media may not improve their desirability since most voters draw a connection between media visibility and pre-campaigning." (*Newsbreak*, "Voters don't like pre-campaigning: study", March 14)

The study "IMPRESS1ON: Importance of Media Presence on the Bid for the 2010 National Elections" was the result of 681 face-to-face interviews with residents in urban and suburban

Only complete information and analyses can help the electorate make informed choices when they are called on to cast their ballots

Metro Manila, Central Luzon, and the provinces of Cavite, Batangas, Laguna, Rizal, and Quezon as well as two focus group discussions of potential Filipino voters.

Eighty-three percent of the respondents believed that "name recall, publicity, popularity and media mileage, or simply put, pre-campaigning was the motivation behind the potential candidates' media presence." The study also showed that "only sixteen percent believed that their presence in the media was work-related."

The study found that the participants viewed the media as information providers and watchdogs, which proves that the role of the news media is relevant during campaign periods, especially in between elections. Only complete information and analyses can help the electorate make informed choices when they are called on to cast their ballots.

What is to be done?

Beyond the usual day-to-day reporting on the Senate hearing—or highlighting Santiago's colorful language—the broadcast and print reports could have helped sort out messages in the government campaigns.

Not all information from the government is solely for political gain. The press is thus duty-bound to sort out the truth in political advertising and to call attention to the most important public issues involved.

During campaign periods, the media provide the communication channels for candidates to reach the voters and vice versa. But campaign periods are also opportunities for added financial gain for the media, from which ensues conflicts of interest. Transparent, accurate and fair news media are critical during elections. Media literacy should be emphasized as well so the public may understand how the media work and how they can be, and often are used by vested interests. ■



Santiago

Photos by LITO OCAMPO

From e-mail to jail—and back

The case of Prita Mulyasari versus the Omni International Alam Sutra Hospital has become a cause célèbre in Indonesia



Prita

RITA AYUNINGTYAS/KOMPAS.COM

■ By Warief Djajanto Basorie

(The media situation in the other countries of Southeast Asia is no less complex than that in the Philippines, as the following account of a free expression case in Indonesia reveals.)

IT TOOK the mother of two under-fives to unintentionally raise a public debate on the threat to freedom of expression by a new electronic information law. Prita Mulyasari, 32, had landed in the Tangerang Women's Correctional Facility for e-mailing a complaint to friends on Aug. 15, 2008 about the hospital service she had received. The private e-mail got into numerous mailing lists. It reached the hospital concerned and the hospital sued her for libel.

The Omni International Alam Sutra Hospital in Tangerang, Banten province, a two-hour drive West from Jakarta, filed the complaint. The police compiled a dossier. The Tangerang prosecutor's office, using the Criminal Code and the 2008 Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE) Act, indicted her. The Tangerang

District Court found her guilty in a civil case last May 11. Officers from the prosecutor's office picked her up at home and brought her to prison last May 13.

When the news media got wind of the case, a public outcry ensued. Sympathy surged among bloggers and Facebook users. Her forced separation from her three-

year-old son and one-year-old daughter was a strong emotive factor. Netizens demanded Prita's release.

The event occurred during an Indonesian presidential campaign, and all three presidential candidates got into the act and called for fairness. Pending a criminal case hearing last June 4, the district court released her "for humanitarian reasons" last June 3, but Prita must stay within city limits.

The case of Prita Mulyasari versus the Omni International Alam Sutra Hospital has become a cause célèbre, a much publicized legal issue. Four questions emerge. What was Prita's complaint about in her private e-mail to friends? Does the hospital have the right to file a lawsuit and claim an offense has been committed against it? Was the use by the Tangerang prosecutor's office of the Electronic Information and Transactions Act (ITE) appropriate? Are the articles in the Act as applied by the prosecuting attorney an infringement on freedom of expression?

The ITE articles cite acts liable to prosecution. This act is on the transmission of electronic information with libelous content (Art. 27, paragraph 3). The penalty for this offense is six years in prison and/or a one billion rupiah fine or approximately \$106,000 (Art. 45).

What was Prita's complaint about in a private e-mail to friends that allegedly contained elements of libel? Prita's e-mail bore the heading "Fraud at the Omni International Alam Sutra Hospital, Tangerang". The e-mail "gives a bad impact," hospital lawyer Risma Situmorang said. Prita's e-mail was sent out on Aug. 30, 2008. She had entered the Omni hospital Aug. 7 with a headache and fever.

Her complaint was that she was not fully advised what her ailment was and what medication she had been given. Her condition became worse and she switched to another hospital. She claimed the doctors at Omni lied to her concerning a medical record the hospital said was sent to Prita's home but Prita insisted she did not receive. Upon questioning, the hospital told Prita the receipt was signed by a certain "Rukiah", but Prita said there is no Rukiah at her home.

The Omni hospital issued a statement on Sept. 8, 2008 denying Prita's claims. Several news outlets picked up the statement. The hospital said Prita's e-mail "is not true and not in line with the facts that actually took place." The letter further said that Prita's "irresponsible actions" had "damaged the good name" of the hospital and that of two staff doctors.

The letter was a general statement of denial and expressed the intent to take legal action against Prita. But it did not respond to and did not clarify item by item the specific complaints that Prita had detailed in her e-mail.

Prita is charged under Art. 310 of the Criminal Code on defamation. A conviction can lead to a maximum sentence of 14 months in prison. She is also charged with Art. 311 of the Criminal Code on defamation in writing, libel, and that carries a maximum four-year jail sentence. On top of that, the ITE Act was also thrown at her.

Did the hospital have the right to sue a former patient for defamation? None of Prita's supporters denied outright that the hospital has this right. However, it is arguable whether words like "fraud" and "lying" constitute defamation. Perhaps President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono summed it up best. He suggested to authori-



Prita with her children in a Facebook photo



At the Tangerang District Court

JP/R. BERTO WEDHATAMA



Prita during a solidarity action led by the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI)

AJI File Photo

ties that in enforcing the law they also use their conscience and a sense for justice.

Was the use of the ITE Act by the prosecutors appropriate? Attorney General Hendarman Supandji said the Tangerang prosecutors were "unprofessional" in drawing up the indictment. He unceremoniously removed the Banten province chief prosecutor who reportedly was directly involved in the Prita case.

Are the articles in the Act an infringement on freedom of expression? Freedom of expression advocates said the Act should in no way diminish the people's freedom of expression. Its provisions should be used proportionately so that freedom of expression as defined by the Constitution is guaranteed outright, said Ihdhal Kasim, chair of Indonesia's National Commission for Human Rights.

Ihdhal said Prita's case is unique. Her complaint about the hospital was in a private communication that spread into the public domain. "Due to this, she should not be so unquestionably arrested just because her message entered the realm of the public. Further, there was no intent to damage a good name," he told reporters.

Patra M. Zen, chair of the executive board of the Legal Aid Institute Foundation, said the authorities must look at the question of intent. Prita's letter does not

appear to contain any intent at defamation, Patra believes. Ihdhal and Patra agree the government should review the law so that its control mechanism does not cut back on the rights of citizens.

Last May a group of press freedom advocacy non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including the Press Legal Aid Institute (LBH Pers) and the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) petitioned for a judicial review of Article 27 of the ITE Act by the Constitutional Court, the arbiter for complaints on the laws of the land. The Constitutional Court rejected the petition in a May 4 ruling. Defamation or false accusations by electronic means is possible, reasoned Constitutional Court chief Mahfud M.D. But the application of the ITE Act must follow



Presidential candidate Megawati Soekarnoputri visits Prita (left) at the women's detention house in Tangerang, west of Jakarta.

JP/J. ADIGUNA

the Criminal Code, he contended during a press briefing.

No follow up judicial review is possible. However, the govern-

ment and the House of Representatives (DPR) could initiate an amendment to the law.

Any amendment should specify whether electronic information transmitted privately and not released to a public domain can subject the sender or authors to indictment. Second, even if the information does enter the public sphere, the question is whether there is a clear case of malice so that legal action can be brought against the accused. If the final goal is to uphold freedom of expression, the lawmakers could move to erase Art. 27 and 45 of the ITE Act as well as Art. 310 and 311 in the Criminal Code. In effect, decriminalize libel and make it a civil offense only.



AJI File Photo

Prita is free, but her case and the case for freedom of expression await final closure

However if the articles are upheld, the lesson learned from the Prita case is that e-mail writers/senders, whether complaining or not complaining about a public service, should be mindful if their message contains any libelous wording.

Meanwhile, health minister Siti Fadilah Supari told the media that if a member of the public is dissatisfied with the health service obtained, she or he can complain to the head of the local health service. If the dissatisfaction persists, the person concerned can complain to the Indonesian Medical Honors Council.

On June 25 the Tangerang District Court threw out the prosecutor's indictment and ruled in Prita's favor. In a provisional decision, the panel of judges said the ITE Act is not applicable until April 21, 2010, two years after it became law. (Art. 54 of the ITE Act stipulates, however, that the law is effective from the time it was enacted. The following paragraph in that article states that government regulations relating to the Act must be in place within two years after the law's enactment at the latest.) The prosecutor has appealed. Prita is free, but her case and the case for freedom of expression await final closure.

Meanwhile the High Court of the province of Banten overruled the Tangerang District Court that acquitted Prita Mulyasari. In a July 27 decision, the High Court ordered the lower court to reopen the case. It faulted the district court for dropping two Criminal Code Articles on defamation and for misinterpreting Art. 27, paragraph 3, of the 2008 Electronic ITE, also on defamation. The High Court determined that the ITE Act is already in force and need not wait for the issuance of implementing regulations two years after the passing of the Act, which was the basis of the district court's acquittal of Prita.

The Tangerang district court reopened the trial of Prita Mulyasari last Aug. 19. No verdict has been reached as of this writing. ■

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CRISIS

■ NATIONAL



Marlene Esperat CMFR FILE PHOTO

Supreme Court transfers venue of cases on attacks against journalists

THE SUPREME Court approved last Aug. 10 the change of venue of the trial of the suspects in the frustrated murder of a Cagayan de Oro City-based broadcaster, and, in a separate decision, the transfer of the cases of the alleged killers of a General Santos City broadcaster, both to Makati City. The court also approved the transfer of the case against the alleged masterminds in the murder of Marlene Esperat to the same city.

The Third Division of the High Court granted the transfer of the trial venue of the case against alleged gunman—Bernardo Aguilar and his accomplices for the frustrated murder of broadcaster Nilo Labares from Branch 21 of the Cagayan de Oro Regional Trial Court (RTC) to any branch of the Makati RTC.

Labares, chief of reporters and anchor for dxCC-Radio Mindanao Network (RMN), survived an attack by a gunman riding tandem on a motorcycle in Cagayan de Oro City last March 5. Before the attack, Labares had received death threats on his mobile phone. He has been reporting on illegal gambling activities in the province such as video *karera* and cockfighting.

Labares and the Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists (FFFJ) requested the transfer of the case for the security of Labares' family, witnesses, and the prosecution. FFFJ had received information that there were attempts to prevent potential witnesses from testifying in court.

In his letter to Chief Justice Reynato Puno last March 17, Labares said, "If the case will proceed to trial here in Cagayan de Oro City I know that the protectors/coddlers will eventually get to me and kill me in order to silence me forever

especially now that the gunman is free on bail. My witnesses will also hesitate to testify given the power and influence that these people have in the area. Who knows, even the judges here may not be beyond the influence of these highly-placed individuals and my case might end up getting dismissed."

FFFJ is a coalition of six media organizations formed to address the continuing killings of and attacks against journalists in the Philippines. The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) is a founding member and serves as the secretariat of FFFJ.

Earlier, the High Court also approved the change of trial venue of the case against the alleged killer and accomplices in the killing of broadcaster Dennis Cuesta to Makati City from General Santos City.

CMFR received Aug. 28 the July 13 resolution of the First Division of the Supreme Court ordering the Branch 37 of General Santos City RTC to immediately transmit the records of the case against former Police Inspector Redempto "Boy" Acharon et. al for the murder of Cuesta (Criminal Case No. 20846) to the Executive Judge of the RTC in Makati City.

FFFJ filed the petition in Feb. 2009 on the argument that the influence of the accused in the province of General Santos City would deny the prosecution a fair trial. Acharon is a cousin of the mayor of General Santos City and was the head of the city government's civil security unit.



Cuesta CMFR FILE PHOTO

Gloria, widow of Cuesta, told CMFR that the transfer of the case to Makati City is a "big help." "*Hindi na puwedeng ma-impluwensyahan ng both parties ang case* (Neither party can influence the case)," Gloria said.

But, as other media organizations have pointed out, Gloria said the arrest of Acharon and his ac-

JOURNALISTS STILL BEING KILLED 26 YEARS AFTER NINOY'S DEATH

Aug. 20 statement of the Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists (FFFJ) on the failure of the Philippine National Police to arrest the suspects in the murders of Marlene Esperat and Dennis Cuesta

FFFJ IS an alliance of six media organizations—the Center for Community Journalism and Development, the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR), the *Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas* (Association of Broadcasters of the Philippines), the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, the Philippine Press Institute, and the US-based newspaper *Philippine News*—created to address the killing of journalists in the Philippines and to assist besieged journalists. It provides financial, legal and other support for prosecution of case and for the survivors of slain journalists, as well as for the witnesses in the killings. CMFR serves as the FFFJ Secretariat.

THE PHILIPPINES marked the 26th anniversary of the assassination of Sen. Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino last Aug. 21. Aquino's assassination emboldened the anti-dictatorship resistance, and led to the ouster of the Marcos regime and his widow Corazon's assuming the Presidency in 1986. Press freedom and other rights were officially restored during Aquino's term of office. But 26 years later, its full realization is still problematic as reflected in the continuing killing of journalists for their work.

The persistence of the killings has been attributed to a culture of impunity in which the killers and the masterminds have mostly evaded prosecution in a flawed justice system.

The successful prosecution of a criminal case, to which the FFFJ and its member organizations are committed as part of their efforts to dismantle the culture of impunity, depends on several factors, the most basic of which is the arrest of the accused. There is no consolation in having a criminal case filed only to have the court order it archived prior to arraignment simply because the accused is at large. But it continues to happen.

Without the accused in court, there can be no arraignment. This stage of criminal proceedings in the Philippines requires informing the accused of the nature and cause of the charges, and the accused's personally entering a plea. The rationale behind this rule is due process: the accused must know and understand the charges against him so that he may adequately pre-

pare for his defense.

While the rights of the accused are clearly provided for under the Rules of Court and protected by no less than the Constitution, the right of the plaintiff to justice depends greatly on the efficiency of the prosecution and the law enforcers.

Thus, the coordination between prosecutors and law-enforcement agencies tasked to arrest the accused is crucial. No amount of superb "lawyering" on the part of prosecutors can make up for the failure of law enforcers to arrest the accused.

This is the current snag faced by the criminal cases against the alleged masterminds in the killing of journalists Marlene Esperat and against the killers of Dennis Cuesta. Criminal proceedings have come to a halt as the accused in the two cases remain at large.

Simply put, the prosecution cannot move forward until the accused are arrested. The proverbial ball is in the court of the Philippine National Police's (PNP) Task Force *Usig*.

Task Force *Usig* is the law enforcement group mandated to investigate incidents of extralegal killings of media practitioners and members of activist organizations, and to arrest the suspects in said killings.

To date, in relation to media killings, there is only one arrest that Task Force *Usig* can legitimately claim as the result of its efforts.

Despite heeding the order of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to form one tracking team for every identified suspect or accused in the killing of journalists,

these teams have yet to yield positive results.

In the case of Esperat, despite the issuance of a third warrant of arrest against accused Osmeña Montañer and Estrella Sabay in Oct. 2008, the Task Force *Usig* tracking teams cannot even state with certainty the present location of the two accused.

The Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat, has denied with finality the motion of Montañer and Sabay to have the case against them quashed or dismissed. Their lawyers have filed before the Court of Appeals (CA), Cagayan de Oro City, a Petition for Certiorari and Prohibition. Among others, they seek the issuance of a Temporary Restraining Order to halt criminal proceedings before the Tacurong City RTC. The CA has not yet acted on said petition.

There being no legal impediment to the serving of the warrant of arrest, the failure of Task Force *Usig* to arrest Montañer and Sabay is a manifestation of the inefficiency of said PNP group. Montañer has left the country via the "back door" and is now in Malaysia, say FFFJ sources.

Cuesta's case is even more telling. One of the accused, Redempto "Boy" Acharon, is a first cousin of the incumbent General Santos City mayor and was also a police inspector of the city. A second warrant for his arrest was issued early April this year. At present, he remains a free man.

Several residents and media practitioners report having seen the accused in public places such as a restaurant. Yet, Task Force *Usig* claims his whereabouts is unknown, and the warrant of arrest against its former colleague remains unserved.

Official claims on the part of Department of Justice officials and the Task Force *Usig* that they are working to turn the wheels of justice for slain journalists are worth nothing in the light of this current situation.

FFFJ calls on the PNP to rigorously locate and arrest the suspects and masterminds in the killing of journalists as the crucial first step for their prosecution. We also call on all media and journalists, as well as the public at large, to demand the same of the PNP. Unless the police do their job first of all, all efforts to stop further killings will be for naught, the failure to prosecute the killers and masterminds being at the root of the persistence of the culture of impunity. ■

CRISIS

complices should be prioritized. News that Acharon has been seen around his farm in General Santos City reached Gloria and Cuesta's colleagues. A reward of P90,000 has been appropriated by the national government for any information that could lead to the arrest of Acharon.

A second warrant of arrest was issued against Acharon last April 7, almost two months after the first warrant was withdrawn due to the re-raffing of the case. The case was transferred from Branch 36 to Branch 37 of the RTC in General Santos City.

Meanwhile, last Sept. 24, the officer-in-charge of the Office of the Clerk of Court of Tacurong City RTC personally delivered to the Makati RTC the records of the murder case against the alleged masterminds in the killing of journalist Marlene Esperat.

The First Division of the Supreme Court ordered last Aug. 26 Branch 20 of the Tacurong City RTC to transmit the records of the case against alleged masterminds Osmeña Montañer and Estrella Sabay to Makati City. CMFR received a copy of the resolution on Sept. 14.

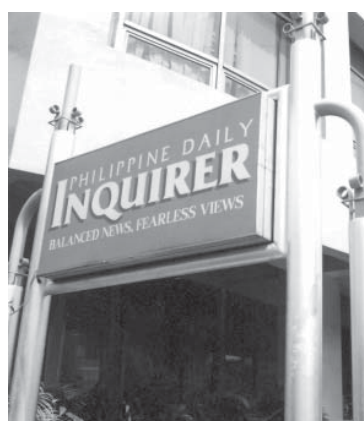
The Supreme Court also directed and authorized the "judge to whom the case is assigned to hear and decide the subject case with utmost dispatch."

Esperat, a columnist for *The Midland Review*, was shot dead by a gunman in her home in Sultan Kudarat on March 24, 2005. The gunman and his accomplices were allegedly ordered by Montañer and Sabay to kill Esperat for her reports on their supposed participation in illegal acts at the local office of the Department of Agriculture in Region XII where they served as finance officer and regional accountant, respectively.

The FFFJ argued that "even if the conviction of the triggermen was achieved in record time, the existence of a double standard of justice in our country's judicial system cannot be denied if the (alleged) masterminds remain unpunished." No mastermind has been successfully convicted in the Philippines since 2001.

Prima Jesusa Quinsayas, private prosecutor representing the Esperat family, welcomed the transfer of the case to the Makati RTC. "The transfer is good news," said Quinsayas who also serves as FFFJ legal counsel.

The prosecution is still awaiting developments on the petition for certiorari and prohibition filed by the lawyers of Montañer and Sabay before the Court of Appeals in Cagayan de Oro City.



LITO OCAMPO

Estrada sues Inquirer

DEPOSED PRESIDENT Joseph "Erap" Estrada filed a libel complaint last Sept. 17 against a Manila-based broadsheet for a report on his alleged coercion of a businessman in 1998.

Libel is a criminal offense in the Philippines. Media groups have been calling for the decriminalization of libel, which has been abused by several powerful politicians and personalities to intimidate the press.

Estrada was removed from office in 2001 and convicted of plunder in 2007. He was pardoned by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2008 after talks between him and her allies.

Estrada filed a libel complaint against the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* for its Sept. 16 front-page, banner story "Erap bullied me, says (Alfonso) Yuchengco: Taipan confirms coercion in PLDT (Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company) deal". *Inquirer* publisher Isagani Yambot, editor-in-chief Letty Jimenez-Magsanoc, and reporters Christine Avendaño, Doris Dumlao and Daxim Lucas were named respondents in the complaint filed before the prosecutor's office of San Juan City. Yuchengco was also included in the libel complaint.

The *Inquirer* reported last Sept. 16 Yuchengco's statement that he was coerced by the Estrada government into selling the shares of his company Philippine Telecommunication Investment Corp. (PTIC) in the PLDT to First Pacific Co. represented by Manuel Pangilinan in 1998. Yuchengco's statement confirmed an earlier claim by former national police chief, now Senator Panfilo Lacson.

Yuchengco's statement came a day after Lacson delivered a privilege speech on the deposed president's allegedly illegal acts during his administration. Estrada was president from 1998 to Feb. 2001. Lacson was a former supporter of Estrada and served as chief of the Philippine National Police and head of the Presidential Anti-Organized

Crime Task Force during Estrada's administration.

Other news organizations also reported Yuchengco's statement, but Estrada only sued the *Inquirer*. The *Inquirer* and Estrada have been at odds since 1998 when Estrada accused the newspaper of bias against him. Estrada later instigated an ad boycott against the *Inquirer*.



Arroyo's alleged photo

President's son wants Facebook regulated

PAMPANGA 2ND district Rep. Juan Miguel "Mikey" Arroyo, one of the sons of Pres. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, has called for tighter regulation over the content of the social networking site Facebook.

Mikey Arroyo told *The Daily Tribune* that Facebook and other similar sites should be regulated to avoid "abuse by scrupulous (sic) people."

"Facebook is easily susceptible to abuse as people can easily hide their identities. *Masahol pa sila sa kuwentong barbero* (They're worse than hearsay)," Arroyo was quoted in the Sept. 30 *Tribune* report.

Arroyo was reacting to a Facebook user's post, Sept. 27: a photo allegedly showing Arroyo looking at an array of liquor in a supermarket in Quezon City a day after devastating floods brought by a tropical storm had hit Metro Manila.

The Facebook account holder, as quoted by the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* in its Sept. 30 report, said in the post: "Was buying food for keeps...then we saw Mikey Arroyo in Rustan's (a supermarket) liquor section asking the salesman for a brand of hard alcoholic drink. Effin' crazy! Just a few kilometers away from Katipunan, people (needed) help for search and rescue, and there he was buying bottles of alcohol. See for yourself and tell me what you think."

Arroyo claimed the photo and comment was a "malicious attack" against him.

He said it would have been impossible for him to go to the supermarket on Sept. 26 as the road where Rustan's is located, Katipu-

His Own Worst Argument

STATEMENT OF the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility on the Aug. 25 privilege speech of Rep. Rodante Marcoleta of the Alagad Party List

Rep. Rodante Marcoleta's August 25 privilege speech at the House of Representatives completely misses the point about the Right of Reply Bill. A Right of Reply Bill may extend to non-media people the same right to free expression that's being claimed by the media. But it would be at the cost of press freedom.

Rep. Marcoleta similarly misses the point as far as the media's ethical responsibility of providing space and time to those whose views may not have been adequately presented. Compelling compliance with this ethical imperative through a law infringes on the editorial prerogative, fundamental to the news media, of deciding with neither fear nor favor what to publish or air.

An *Inquirer* editorial the congressman tried to use as a justification for the Right of Reply Bill on the other hand does exactly the opposite. By admitting an error of fact and correcting it, the *Inquirer* demonstrated that a newspaper does not need a law, only its commitment to the values of fairness and accuracy, to comply with ethi-

cal standards. And yet Rep. Marcoleta would hold the *Inquirer's* effort at accuracy and fairness against it.

Rep. Marcoleta also cites the examples of several European countries where a Right of Reply law is in force, but forgets his own warning, made in connection with the 1974 US Supreme Court ruling that right of reply laws are unconstitutional, that every country's situation is different. In the case of the Philippines, the danger in a Right of Reply Bill is the present regime's hostility towards the press, which it regards as a major factor in exposing the corruption that rules it.

Rep. Marcoleta's speech reeks of the same antipathy towards the press that has been driving the Arroyo regime's policy towards the independent media. It is its own worst argument, and demonstrates once more the urgency of continuing press and public opposition to the Right of Reply Bill, the Senate version of which Rep. Marcoleta would have the House pass without going through the bicameral committee. ■

nan Avenue, Quezon City, was "impassable" at the height of the storm. Several bloggers and netizens had re-posted the photo, saying that Arroyo had been seen at the "height" of typhoon Ondoy (International code name Ketsana). But the photo, the original post said, was taken on Sept. 27, a day after Ondoy hit the Philippine capital and when Katipunan Avenue was already passable. Arroyo also said he was in Malacñang on Sept. 26 helping in the rescue and relief operations.

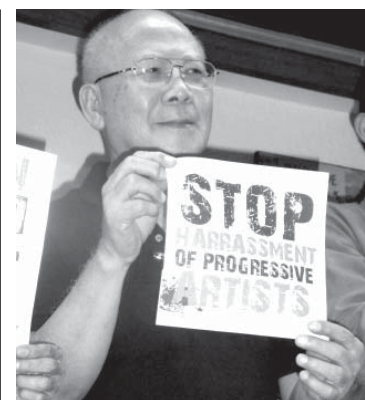
Tropical Storm "Ondoy" left approximately 300 dead and thousands homeless in Metro Manila and nearby provinces, including Pampanga, the Arroyos' home province.

The Facebook user has removed the photo from his/her account.

Writers will sue Philippine military for spying on them

TWO FILIPINO writers are suing the Philippine military for allegedly spying on them.

Bienvenido Lumbera, a National Artist for Literature and a professor at the University of the Philippines



Lumbera ARKIBONG BAYAN PHOTO

(UP), is planning to file charges at the Commission of Human Rights of the Philippines against the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) after a marine corporal was caught taking photos of his residence in Quezon City last Sept. 17. Fictionist Pedro "Jun" Cruz Reyes, another professor at the University of the Philippines, has also indicated that he will sue the AFP for the same alleged offense.

A Marine Corporal Hannival Mondido Guerrero was apprehended by security men of the gated community where Lumbera lives.

Navy spokesperson Lt. Col. Edgardo Arevalo of the Philippine Ma-

CRISIS

rines confirmed that Guerrero was indeed a member of the armed forces and was conducting "information verification" as part of his "surveillance training" at the Naval Intelligence Training Institute. (The *Philippine Daily Inquirer* reported last Sept. 17 that Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said Guerrero was not in the Navy's master list.)

Arevalo also apologized. "We would like to apologize to Professor Lumbera for whatever inconvenience the incident caused him," Arevalo was quoted by the *Inquirer* last Sept. 17.

But Lumbera told *GMANews.TV* he would still file charges against the AFP.

"I accept their apology, but I don't necessarily believe the details they said," Lumbera said last Sept. 18.

As a result of the Lumbera incident, Reyes had reported that he too has been under military surveillance since 2006.

During a Sept. 22 press conference, Reyes shared incidents in which the military allegedly surveilled him. He said the latest incidents happened in early September.

In an affidavit quoted by GMA-7's primetime news program *24 Oras*, Reyes said that "Noong Setyembre 13, 2009...gawing ala-8 ng gabi, inilabas niya ang dalawa nilang cellphone at ginamit ang isa niyang cellphone para ako ay pagkukuhanan ng litrato (Last Sept. 13, around 8 p.m., the man pulled out two mobile phones. He used one to take my picture [without permission])."

Online news magazine *Bulatlat* had reported that Reyes was in the Army's order of battle in Bulacan as early as 2006. In 2007, unidentified men also tried to enter his house, said Reyes.

Critical writers, journalists, and media organizations have been targets of surveillance by the AFP. In 2009, journalist Carlos Conde found that he had been included in a 2007 "order of battle" of the AFP 10th Infantry Division. The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines has also been tagged as an "enemy of the state" by the military.

Editors threatened

EDITORS OF a Davao City-based newspaper received death threats last Aug. 20 for publishing stories allegedly biased for the city government.

Stella Estremera and Virginia "Gigie" Agtay, editor in chief and news editor, respectively, of *Sun. Star Davao*, received two threatening messages last Aug. 20. Both

messages were sent through Agtay's mobile phone.

The first message arrived at around 7:20 p.m. warning Estremera that a single bullet could end her life if she remains "biased" for the city government. Another message came approximately two hours later (9:07 p.m.) asking Agtay to tell Estremera to be fair in her reports. The message, loosely translated from the original Visayan-Tagalog mix, said: "You've been regarded as an outstanding journalist, but you can't always be on top. A single bullet would be enough for you two."

Estremera in the *Sun.Star Davao* report denied that their news reports had been slanted in favor of the Davao City government. "(Our) stories can speak for themselves," she said in the report.

Estremera also denied being on the payroll of the city government.

The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility tried to call the mobile number (+63917-912-5620) used in sending the threats, but it is no longer accessible. The incident has been reported to the local police.

Mayor Rodrigo Duterte is a controversial figure who has been accused by, among others, his political rival, House of Representatives Speaker Prospero Nograles, of at least tolerating the extra-judicial killing of drug pushers and other common criminals. One of the cases of the two journalists killed in Davao City during Duterte's watch has been linked to the mayor, who has denied any involvement. On the other hand, it was Nograles who sued local broadcaster Alexander Adonis for libel. Adonis was pardoned after serving almost two years of a four-year sentence. Libel is a criminal offense in the Philippines. ■

INTERNATIONAL



Tamil journalist sentenced to 20 years

A TAMIL journalist was sentenced to 20 years of hard labor for allegedly supporting terrorism and inciting racial hatred under the anti-terrorism law of Sri Lanka.

This is said to be the first time a journalist has ever been convicted under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) since it was passed in 1979.

The High Court of Colombo convicted J.S. Tissainayagam, a columnist for the newspaper *Sunday Times* and an editor for the online news *OutreachSL*, for violating provisions of the PTA after causing "communal disharmony" by writing articles and publishing the now defunct *Northeastern Monthly*. The *Northeastern Monthly* criticized the government's role in the war against the Tamil Tiger rebels and accused authorities of withholding food and other essential items from Tamil-populated areas.

The high court also found Tissainayagam guilty of "receiving money from Tamil Tiger rebels (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) to pay for his website." But the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) reported that the website was funded by a German aid project.

He was indicted in Aug. 2008, almost five months after members of the terrorism investigation division arrested Tissainayagam on March 7, 2008. From March to August, Tissainayagam stayed in prison without any charge.

RSF said that: "The imposition of this extremely severe sentence on Tissainayagam suggests that some Sri Lanka judges confuse justice with revenge." It added that: "With the help of confessions extracted by force and information that was false or distorted, the court has used an anti-terrorism law that was intended for terrorists, not for journalists and human rights activists."

Despite the end of the war between the government and the Tamil Tigers, attacks against journalists who do not support the government policies continue in Sri Lanka. Vettivel Jasikaran and Vadivel Valamathy are still facing anti-terror charges for allegedly helping Tissainayagam. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported. Jasikaran owned the printing business that published the *Northeastern Monthly* and is part of the *OutreachSL*.

Tissainayagam will be receiving the 2009 International Press Freedom Award from the New York-based CPJ. The Globe Media Forum and RSF also said that Tissainayagam will be the first recipient of the Peter Mackler Prize, "a newly created award for journalists who display great courage and professional integrity in countries where press freedom is not respected." — IFEX/CPJ ■

CHRONICLE

Knight Fellowships now open

THE STANFORD University is accepting applications for the 2010-2011 Knight Fellowships program. Nine journalists/media practitioners from outside the United States will be chosen. The deadline for application is on Dec. 15, 2009.

With the changes in the media landscape, the Knight Fellowships program will focus on innovation, entrepreneurship and leadership in media. The program will train the fellow-journalists to "recognize and meet technological, economic and audience-driven challenges."

Full-time journalists as well as freelancers and journalism business and management executives who have influence over editorial material are eligible for the Knight Fellowships. Applications from entrepreneurs and innovators whose work have "great journalistic impact" are also welcome. The program will prioritize journalists from countries where the press has "direct impact on the development of a free press and flow of information" in the society.

International fellows will receive a stipend of \$60,000 plus other supplemental allowances. The grants for international fellows will come from different groups, including the Fulbright program, the Knight Foundation, the Shin-young Journalism Fund, the Lyle and Corrine Nelson International Journalism Fellowship Fund and the Yahoo! International Journalism Fund.

Last year, ABS-CBN 2 senior correspondent Nadia Trinidad was chosen for the 2009-2010 program.

Since 1966, the Knight Fellowships have provided journalists from around the globe a chance to enhance their skills to better serve the public.

For more information on the Knight Fellowships, visit <http://knight.stanford.edu>.

2010 Asia Journalism Fellowship

FILIPINO JOURNALISTS with at least five years of working experience are welcome to apply to the 2010 Asia Journalism Fellowship (AJF) program at the Nanyang Technological University's Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information.

Fifteen Asian journalists will be chosen for the three-month program. It will run from February to April 2010. Deadline for application is on Nov. 6.

The AJF program aims to "sharpen professional skills" and "deepen the understanding of trends in media and communication at a time of rapid and sweeping change."

For more information, visit AJF's website: <http://www.ajf.sg>.

3rd Bright Leaf Agriculture Journalism winners announced

TEN JOURNALISTS received the Bright Leaf Agriculture Journalism awards for 2009. Stories published or broadcast from June 15, 2008 to May 15, 2009 were included in the selection.

This year's Best Agriculture Story was *Manila Bulletin's* "A housing material made from chicken feathers" written by Melpha Abello, while the Best Agriculture Photo was taken by Edgardo Espiritu ("Spice Scarecrow"). The Best Tobacco Story was "Something new to Virginia tobacco" by Zac Sarian, and the Best Tobacco Photo was by Andy Zapata ("Among the Best").

Other winners were: Neil Jerome Morales (Best Agriculture News Story - National, "Mango exports reel from pesticide curbs"), Francis Martin (Best Agriculture Feature Story - Regional, "Most outstanding farmer practices indigenous farming"), Miko Jasmine Mojica (Best Agriculture Feature Story - National, "When fish catch a cold, the rest of the world sneezes"), Gloria Tuazon (Best Agriculture Feature Story - Regional, "The scent that heals"), Inez Magbual (Best Agriculture TV Program/Segment, "Corn [Crafts from corn husks]"), and Salvador Cruzana Jr. (Best Agriculture Radio Program/Segment, "Carera's Farm: Big Time at 200").

University of the Philippines Los Baños College of Agriculture Prof. Candida Adalla, Press Photographers of the Philippines director Jerry Carual, Publishers Association of the Philippines Inc. president Jun Dayang, National Tobacco Administration chair Carlitos Encarnacion, Isabela Gov. Grace Padaca and Department of Agriculture Sec. Arthur Yap composed the panel of judges this year.

Other information on the Bright Leaf Agriculture Journalism Awards is in its website <http://www.brightleafawards.com>. ■

OBIT



LITO OCAMPO

PABICO, 42

Filipino journalist Alexander "Alecks" P. Pabico lost his battle to liver cancer last Oct. 7. He was 42.

Pabico was former head of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism's (PCIJ) multimedia desk. He created and managed the PCIJ web portal and its subsidiary sites (the main organizational site, blog, database site, etc.). He was with PCIJ for over a decade and left for health reasons in Jan. 2009 to undergo alternative and homeopathic treatment. Pabico was diagnosed with the disease last year.

PCIJ's founding executive di-

rector Sheila Coronel said "Alecks and I worked together for nearly 15 years. We spent many long nights at the office, some of them with Nonoy Marcelo. Alecks not only worked in PCIJ, he believed in it."

Friend and former PCIJ colleague Vinia D. Mukherjee said Pabico "was a perfectionist, he broke paths with his Web savvy, he was dedicated to his profession, and without him, PCIJ would not have become what it is now."

PCIJ honored Pabico by sharing some of his stories online: <http://www.pcij.org/?p=4581>. In their tribute, Pabico was described as "Gen-

tle and unassuming, Alecks was every bit the fierce, noble warrior when he stepped into battle, wielding his pen (and later, his keyboard and mouse) mightily in the quest for truth."

He was an award-winning investigative journalist. Pabico wrote on a number of salient issues including agrarian reform, aquaculture operations, working women, plight of migrant workers and drug offenders.

His work on the plight of indigenous peoples won him the third prize in the 3rd Louie R. Prieto Journalism Awards in 1999. His blog post about population and develop-

ment issues won the 2nd PopDev Media Awards. His accomplishments included a Developing Asia journalism award for a governance story given by the Asian Development Bank in 2008 and a Southeast Asian Press Alliance journalism fellowship in 2004.

Pabico studied architecture. But college introduced him to another love—journalism. He was editor in chief of the University of the Philippines' (UP) official student publication *The Philippine Collegian* from 1991 to 1992. He also edited the student publication of UP's College of Architecture. ■

DIGMA, 36

Ariel N. Digma, a Filipino journalist who worked for *Kyodo News*, died in a car accident last Aug. 3. He was 36.

Digma's car hit a concrete wall along the highway in Bacoor, Cavite while he was driving home from his coverage of the burial of former President Corazon "Cory" Aquino. Cavite is a province located south of Manila.

Kyodo News is a nonprofit cooperative media organization reported to be the largest news agency in Japan. It distributes news to almost all newspapers and radio-TV networks in the said country. Digma joined its Manila bureau last May. Prior to *Kyodo News*, Digma was a reporter for the Manila Bureau of TV Asahi, a television network in Japan.

Digma also served as a reporter for *Malaya* and *The Manila Times*. He worked as a media relations officer for former Senate President Marcelo Fernan, Sec. Angelito Banayo, and Sen. Panfilo Lacson. He was also a media consultant for the Philippine Tourism Authority.

The Foreign Correspondents Association of the Philippines said in a statement "Ariel had been very much around—in news conferences, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) summits, (and) major news events. He was quiet, unassuming but hard working and always abreast of the news and goings on. He exemplified the ideals of a dedicated, professional journalist and was a close friend to many of us.... Ariel will be missed."

ROXAS, 86

Former *Associated Press* (AP) journalist Mario Halili Roxas passed away last Aug. 25. He was 86.

Roxas spent almost 30 years with the international news agency. He was a news editor and a sports writer.

He was a member of the National Press Club and the Philippine Sportswriters Association.

He left journalism to pursue a career in public relations (PR). In the 1970s, he joined Gonzalo Puyat and Sons as a PR executive.

(Source: *The Philippine Star*, Aug. 28, page A-31)

MANUEL, 66

Veteran sportswriter Virgilio "Boy" Manuel died following a lingering illness last Sept. 14. He was 66.

Manuel was the sports section editor of the University of the Philippines' campus newspaper *The Philippine Collegian* when Martial Law had just been declared.

(Source: *The Philippine Star*, Sept. 21 and the official Facebook group page of *The Philippine Collegian*)



Hewitt

CBS

HEWITT, 86

Donald Shepard "Don" Hewitt, the man behind the popular American news magazine *60 Minutes*, lost his battle to pancreatic cancer last Aug. 19 at age 86.

60 Minutes is an hour-long broadcast program of hard news and feature stories. It began on Sept. 24, 1968 with Hewitt as its executive producer, a post he held for 36 years. He stepped down at the conclusion of the 2003 to 2004 season. The news magazine won 73 Emmys, 13 DuPont/Columbia University Awards, and nine Peabody Awards during his stewardship.

Hewitt was a television news pioneer who initiated many broadcasting journalism firsts. He directed the first network television newscast "Douglas Edwards and

the News" on May 3, 1948. He produced the first televised US presidential debate in 1960. He was the first to use cue cards for news readers and to "superimpose" words on the television screen for a news show. He helped develop editing and shape news broadcasts by his use of two film projectors cutting back and forth which breaks up the monotony of the camera's focus on the talking head.

He began his journalism career as a copy boy for the *New York Herald Tribune*. In 1942, he became the youngest war correspondent assigned to Gen. Dwight Eisenhower's London Headquarters. He joined the Merchant Marines during World War II. He started working as an associate director for CBS News in 1948 when television was still at its infancy.

Hewitt was the recipient of several honorary degrees, lifetime achievement and hall of fame awards. He was named Broadcaster of the Year by the International Radio and Television Society in 1980. He was elected to the Television Academy Hall of Fame (1990) and National Association of Broadcasters Hall of Fame (1993). The Directors Guild of America recognized his more than 50 years in television with an achievement award in 2002.

Hewitt published his autobiographical book about television news and his creation of *60 Minutes* titled "Minute By Minute" in 1985. He wrote that there is just a "simple" formula for the success of his show: "It's four words every child knows: Tell me a story."

DUNNE, 83

American movie producer, magazine writer, and novelist Dominick "Nick" Dunne died of bladder cancer last Aug. 26. He was 83.

Dunne was a correspondent for the *Vanity Fair* magazine who was known for his essays on the rich and famous. He covered the most

popular court room dramas of recent history: Claus von Bulow, William Kennedy Smith, the Menendez brothers, O.J. Simpson, Michael Skakel, and Phil Spector.

The then editor of *Vanity Fair* offered him the position as a full-time writer after the publication of his article "Justice: A Father's Account of the Trial of his Daughter's Killer" (March 1984 issue). He described the failures of the legal system in his search for justice on the murder of his daughter in the '80s.

Since then, he had never stopped writing and talking about crime and the human story behind it. Dunne had a television program called truTV's *Power, Privilege, and Justice*. He was also a frequent guest at CNN's *Larry King Live*.

His critically-acclaimed works include "The Two Mrs. Grenvilles" (1985), "People Like Us", "An Inconvenient Woman" (1990), "A Season In Purgatory" (1993), and "Another City, Not My Own".

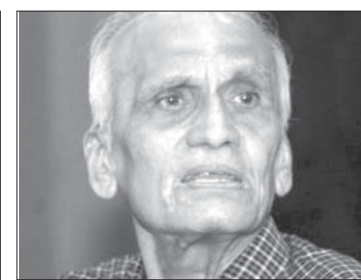
In an interview with *The Washington Post* in 1993, Dunne described his approach in writing: "I'm simply a very good listener. And listening is an underrated skill. If you really listen—if you're really interested—someone is bound to talk."

BHARGAVA, 85

Veteran journalist G.S. Bhargava died Sept. 22 in New Delhi, India at the age of 85. He had been sick and was undergoing treatment for about three months prior his death.

He was a journalist for over four decades. Bhargava was a noted foreign correspondent in several South Asian countries. He was resident editor of the *Indian Express*, Hyderabad and also worked at the *Hindustan Times* as an assistant editor. He wrote a column on media reporting called "Blue Pencil". He was also a known political commentator. He authored several books on social and political events as well as biographies for public officials.

Bhargava served as the princi-



Bhargava

THE HINDU

pal information officer of the government of India in the late '70s. This was in the post-emergency era during the Janata Government.

He was an active member of the Editors Guild of India. The Guild said Bhargava had great interest in the issues of press freedom and as he was fair, he was also as strict when it came to the standards of journalism.

EMERSON, 86

William A. Emerson Jr., editor in chief of the US-based *The Saturday Evening Post*, died of natural causes last Aug. 25. He was 86.

He became editor in chief of *The Post* in 1965 following a succession of editing positions in *Newsweek*. Emerson was the southern bureau chief of *Newsweek* from 1953 to 1961.

Former *Newsweek* editor Osborn Elliott wrote in his memoir that Emerson was "a great, rangy, boddacious man who flapped his arms when he walked and enchanted people when he talked" and who "launched a tradition of sharp and sensitive *Newsweek* reporting from the South."

He was witness to major events of the struggle for civil rights. He covered the case of Brown v. Board of Education, the Supreme Court ruling that outlawed school segregation, and the rise of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

He served in the Army in World War II and then worked for *Collier's* magazine before moving to *Newsweek*. He also taught journalism at the University of South Carolina. ■

Making the case for science journalism

Science reporting is not limited to writing about the total solar eclipse

■ By Likha Cuevas-Miel

WHEN I was in college, some friends often joked that I was a BS Biology or Forestry student instead of a Development Communication major because I enrolled in Limnology, Ecology, Microbiology, Earth Science, Forestry, Botany, and similar classes.

I took 24 units of science courses—on my own volition—during my undergrad years.

I don't know why I took those elective

courses. Maybe because I liked the challenge of trying to understand science and being able to break it down into something more palatable to everyday readers. Or maybe I was just a nerd.

Or maybe I thought I would be able to write scientific stories, like the ones in *Time* or *Newsweek*, and could make science more fun and relevant to ordinary folk.

I knew I had a knack for it. It helps that I grew up in a scientific community, practically in my mother's laboratory (I used to have lunch on her lab table, with the petri dishes that contained multi-colored fungi), and there were days when I thought I was a product of my mother's experiments, so I thought writing science stories would be a breeze.

I was able to put to use my major (Science Communication-Development Journalism at UP Los Baños) a couple of years ago. It was a good learning experience—but I was writing for a government publication, for goodness' sake! It frustrated me that mainstream media virtually ignored our stories. There were so many home-grown technologies and discoveries that should be shared with the people, but these stories were buried under the tons of annual reports and newsletters that our office produced.

I resorted to peddling our stories straight to the beat reporters stationed in that

The lack of science stories or scientifically correct stories in mainstream media perpetuates the maleducation of the population in science and health

government department. But to no avail. Either bureaucratic she-nanigans got in the way, and/or science is not sexy enough for broadsheets.

Maybe it's because science stories do not constitute mudslinging or exposes that are "saleable" enough for mainstream publication. Or maybe it's because some of those stories don't contain discoveries that can make Presidents grow an extra brain, heart or conscience.

I eventually made a career change so I could rock the boat. But that was too naive of me. The newspaper I now work for barely has space for regional stories, so

I guess the science beat is out of the question. I ended up in business. Well, science and business reporting share the basic principle of explaining the incomprehensible to ordinary folk—so it's a good enough trade.

Sadly, however, the Philippines is not like the more developed countries where the media can afford to run stories on the human genome project or stories that delve into the science behind A(H1N1). We seldom read intelligent discussions on genetically modified organisms (GMOs)—or why the seas of Boracay teem with green algae during summer months.

My heart once dropped to my knees when one of the bartenders in Boracay told me that the persistent algae is good because it softens the skin of bathers. Little did she know that algae are a manifestation of elevated nutrients in the water that result from sewage runoffs from groundwater. Ewww, right? Not only that, but that algal bloom will kill the coral, eventually killing the marine life that depend on coral reefs.

But I digress. The point is, the

lack of science stories or scientifically correct stories in mainstream media perpetuates the maleducation of the population in science and health. That's why we still have mothers who believe in feeding their children lizards' eggs to cure asthma or use breast milk to relieve sore eyes.

Newspapers are used by students (who do not have access to the Internet and encyclopedias) as reference materials. They read newspapers for additional knowledge like "who is the secretary of trade?", "what is the capital of Turkey?" and other stuff. Before the advent of Web 1.0 about 20 years ago, my teachers made us read the papers to increase our "stored knowledge" (if there's such a thing). Books are expensive; newspapers are cheap and contain current information on a variety of things.

Now that I am part of that ship that I wanted to rock years ago, I've realized that it was stupid of me to think that a mere science journalist can change how science is reported to the people. I now realize that there are more complicated matters that should be addressed before going down to the nitty-gritty of science reporting. One is the availability of page or column space for such articles. Yes, the big papers have science and technology pages but are they enough?

Two, the availability of reporters that have genuine interest in science reporting. Or the availability of reporters, period.

Three, changing the mindset of the gatekeepers (i.e., the editors and publishers). It requires an appreciation on the part of the gatekeepers for science reporting to take off. Umm no, science reporting is not limited to writing about the total solar eclipse....

It seems like I'm asking for the moon. Probably. In an era of dwindling advertising revenues and newspapers closing down one after another, science journalism may be at the bottom of the list of the things that should be developed.

As I told one reporter in our section, "you have to justify the space that your article is going to occupy in the paper." Maybe I haven't really started defending my own case myself. I mean, I can start with "changing the mindset" of the gatekeepers by being the champion of the science stories that can help develop the scientific culture the country needs to progress. ■

LIKHA CUEVAS-MIEL is assistant business editor of The Manila Times.

