VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT REPORTING

THE MEDIA DEBATES ITS ROLE

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Reporting from situations of conflict and violence is no safer today than it was in the past, despite all the safety measures adopted and all the precautions taken. As a humanitarian organisation that has been operating for over a century and a half, the ICRC recognises the dangers journalists continue to face today. The relationship between the ICRC and the Media is a deep one, not just in this region, but globally. It is no coincidence that the principles of neutrality and independence are crucial to both the work of the ICRC and that of the journalists who work in situations of conflict and violence.

With the changing nature of conflicts and violence, the challenges and constraints for journalists reporting from crisis situations have also increased. The 2013 Senior Editors’ Conference organised in New Delhi aimed at sharing the experiences and the particular challenges faced by journalists from the region, thereby deepening the understanding of the role of media in violence and conflict reporting.
The situations in the countries represented at this conference vary, as no conflict is similar, no context identical. Members of the media community must constantly evolve and adapt themselves to diverse situations, in their attempts to promote responsible and ethical journalism.

Apart from offering an excellent platform for senior mediapersons to share their stories, the conference also paved the way for the identification of some key lessons for all journalists—for instance, the need for impartiality and objectivity when reporting armed violence and conflict.

We, at ICRC’s Regional Delegation in New Delhi have been convening the Senior Editors’ Conference since 2006, when the very first conference was held here, to discuss and highlight the major challenges that mediapersons face while reporting from areas affected by conflict and violence. This was followed by the conferences in Dhaka in 2007, Manila in 2011, New Delhi again in 2013, and Tokyo in 2014. Apart from sharing best practices and experiences with each other, the conferences have, over the years, provided senior editors with an opportunity to have enriching interactions with media students and other stakeholders.

This conference report thus encapsulates the journey of the two-day 2013 conference. We hope that you enjoy reading the report and draw inspiration from the shared experiences and lessons that the discussions generated.
INAUGURAL SESSION
On behalf of the AJK Mass Communication Research Centre, the ICRC, and the Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, I welcome all of you to the two-day Regional Senior Editors’ Conference on ‘Violence and Conflict Reporting: The Media Debates its Role’.

Reporting conflicts, especially in the context of violence, has always been a challenge fraught with great risks and laden with huge moral responsibilities. In the contemporary period, reporting violent conflicts has assumed tremendous significance as the means and methods of armed conflict have transformed. As the majority of armed conflicts are internal, the impact of violence on people is clearly evident in their daily lives, as they live in fear and extreme suffering.

The deliberate targeting of civilians, the looting and destruction of civilian property, the forced displacement of populations, the use of civilians as human shields, the destruction of infrastructure vital to civilians, rape and other forms of sexual violence, torture, indiscriminate attacks—these and other acts of violence are unfortunately a common part of internal conflicts throughout the world.
The challenges presented by these conflicts are, to a certain extent, related to the lack of applicable rules, but more importantly, to the lack of respect for international humanitarian law.

Keeping the focus of today’s conference in mind, there is a need for guaranteeing protection to media professionals, who are increasingly at risk of being wounded, killed, detained, or kidnapped while reporting in armed conflict situations. This is in violation of international humanitarian law. The discussions over the next two days will generate ideas and debates on this important issue, as well as on other dimensions of the role of the media in conflict reporting.

The Mass Communication Research Centre, the Nelson Mandela Centre and the ICRC have brought together this seminar, keeping in mind our priorities in dealing with conflicts, the reporting of conflicts, and the ICRC as the custodian of international humanitarian law.

There is a synergy that has been created by these three institutions, and, therefore, we have amongst us a galaxy of speakers from across the region and beyond.

I welcome everybody, and I will now request the Director of the Mass Communication Research Centre, Professor Obaid Siddiqui, to present his opening remarks.

OBAID SIDDIQUI

Vice-Chancellor Professor S. M. Sajid, Mr Adam Roberts, Ms Mary Werntz, delegates from the South Asian countries, Iran, Afghanistan, and Australia, Honourable guests, colleagues, and my dear students.

AJK Mass Communication Research Centre had organised a conference on violence and conflict reporting in 2006. That was the first conference. A similar conference was later organised in Dhaka in 2007 with the help of the ICRC—indeed in the first conference too, ICRC was the partner. After a gap of about
six years, we have assembled here once again to discuss this important issue.

Those who are not aware of the dangers media professionals face while carrying out their duties may very well ask what has prompted us to organise a conference on this subject, again.

The answer can be both very long and very short. My colleague, Tasneem Meenai, has made my task easier by choosing the middle path, because she has said what could be said to introduce this subject. But let me tell you that in the past 10 years, not only has the media landscape of the country completely changed, but the responsibility of media practitioners has also changed. This is mainly because of certain factors, and one of them is conflict and violence.

I was re-visiting Huntington recently; I was reading his book. It is amazing that 20 years ago, what he had predicted in his book—for which he was criticised globally—has now been proved, because if you look at the Cold War days, you will recollect that in the bi-polar world, conflicts were broadly contained and violence was not so widespread. But since then, if you look at the situation, you will find that every part of the world is plagued with conflict, and conflicts are internal as well as external in nature. And the violence we see is on an unprecedented scale. Unfortunately, we live in this part of the world, in South Asia, where no country is free from violence and conflict. If you look at this region, at all the South Asian countries—Afghanistan, Iran and beyond—you will find conflicts everywhere; and as Ms Tasneem rightly pointed out, they are affecting the lives of the common people and they are affecting the economic growth of this region. They are making our future really bleak.

In such a situation, what can the media do and how should the media report? One aspect that Ms Tasneem pointed out relates to the killings of journalists. If you look at the statistics available with the Committee for Protection of Journalists (CPJ), for example, you will see that the situation is very alarming. Each year, a large number of journalists die in conflict zones while reporting.
Similarly, a large number of journalists also die very mysteriously, and nobody knows who is behind their killings.

My former colleague and friend, Rahimullah Khan Yusufzai, is here; he knows that in Pakistan, it has now become common for journalists to disappear into thin air. Nobody knows where they are, who has kidnapped them, whether they are alive or if somebody has killed them—nobody knows about them. During the course of the next two days, we will be discussing and deliberating on this issue.

We should also think about what we can actually do. When we talk about the media debating its role, what role should the media play, or what role is the media supposed to play in a conflict situation? This is a very important question.

Apart from responsible reporting, there are lots of other things, because reporting is only one thing. What about an analysis of conflicts, which could help shape public opinion and make people aware of the real situation and real issues? So can we also play an important role in conflict resolution? Is it our job, or is it not? There may be people who are of the view that we are simply there to report, and it is not our job to play any role in resolving conflicts.

But I think that in a situation like this, and in a world such as the one we are living in, we have to take into consideration objectivity, impartiality, etc., and see how objective and impartial we can be in a conflict situation. If we know for sure that somebody is an aggressor, then how is it possible for us to equate the aggressor with the victim? Can we then make judgments? Is it possible for us to make judgments? If it is possible, how far can we go?

Tasneem also raised the question of the lack of respect for international humanitarian law, not only by those people involved in conflict, but also by states. It is very essential and important that such laws be respected, in both letter and spirit.

I welcome all of you here and I hope that your stay in Delhi will be comfortable. I am absolutely sure that whatever we discuss in the next two days will definitely go a long way towards resolving certain issues, and finding answers to the questions that trouble us.
Good morning, everyone. I must say that I feel a bit of a fraud here—you have a Regional Conference of Senior Editors. I am not from this region; I am from Britain. I do not consider myself particularly a senior; I am a journalist, a reporter, rather than an editor. So you should discount anything that I have to say if you do not like the sound of it!

I have been a journalist for 15 years; during this time I worked for *The Economist*. I have been very fortunate in my jobs; I have covered international affairs for the whole of my journalistic career, which I think is the most interesting thing to be doing as a journalist. I have had the chance to report from a lot of different countries; I have been to every continent and over 70 countries. I have lived in Africa; I have lived in London; I have lived here—and have enjoyed each one of those times. I strongly recommend to anyone who is thinking of being a journalist to go and grab the opportunity because it is just about the best job in the world that you can do.

But my experience is probably more limited in another sense in comparison with many of the people in this room, certainly many
of the journalists in this room—those of you who are living in countries in this region and have spent your lives in the region will know many of the topics that you are going to be debating much more thoroughly than I do.

But at the risk of being presumptuous, I think that because I have wandered around the world and in terms of the different things that I have seen, I can put out five questions and five potential answers to those questions to which you might then want to respond, if not now, then in the course of the next day or two.

I am going to base my questions on the experience that I have had in places like Sierra Leone in 1998–99 during the civil war that was raging there, reporting from Zimbabwe during the repression under Robert Mugabe, seeing the end of wars in Congo and Angola, in Ethiopia, but also living in cities like Johannesburg, which is an incredibly violent place. A very large number of people are being killed in South Africa every year; it is criminal violence—not a civil war or an international war—but by some estimates, about 100,000 people die in South Africa every year from violent means. We do not call that a war, but we might think that it is violence and a sort conflict as well.

So I will come to those five questions.

The first one is: What counts as a conflict zone? I have just mentioned Johannesburg. When I was in Johannesburg, we lived in a house which had a big electric fence around it; we had a big dog that chased people who came near the gate; we had panic alarms; we had raised gates; we had bars on the windows; we lived in a sense as if we were living in Kabul during the civil war.

What else counts as a conflict zone? I was in Maldives two or three weeks ago, to cover the first round of the Presidential Elections. Maldives is a tourist hotspot and a great place to go, if you are on a honeymoon and want to relax. Yesterday morning, the TV station in Male, the capital, was burnt to the ground. The people stormed into the station, attacked the security guards and
destroyed the TV station. This is in the Maldives—do we consider the Maldives a conflict zone? Normally, we will say no. But if you were the guard at the entrance to that TV station, or if you were one of the journalists working there, right now, you would feel that you were living in a conflict zone.

When does a conflict zone stop being a conflict zone? Two weeks ago, I was in northern Sri Lanka, reporting on the first elections that the Tamils have had since the end of the civil war in 2009. But if you were to do what I did and speak to the only Tamils voting or queuing up to vote at the polling stations, or to the ones who normally would go to the polling stations, you would not feel the conflict is over. They see the military intelligence; they see men in civilian clothes who are obviously soldiers, who intimidate them and scare them. I went up to about 25 people, and the moment I stopped talking to them, the military would come and harass them, and ask them why they were talking to a foreigner. From their point of view, the conflict is not over, even though officially, the conflict ended in 2009.

We can keep asking this question—where is the violence and where is the conflict zone—because arms are really everywhere. If you were in a shopping mall in Nairobi a week or 10 days ago, and Al Shabaab came in with four men or 10 men—we do not know how many exactly—and massacred 60 people around you, you would feel that you were in a conflict zone. If you were in Muzaffarnagar in western UP like I was a week ago, and you were talking to the Muslims who were chased out of their homes, the 40,000 people who had been displaced—it is a mere two hours drive from here, we can all get into a bus and reach the place before lunch—you would see there is a conflict going on in western UP. It is a low-level conflict, a conflict that came after years of tranquility, in which 40 people were killed violently and 40,000 people were displaced.

But we would not consider Uttar Pradesh a traditional war zone or a conflict zone. I think that when we are debating violence,
or reporting on violence and conflict, the very first questions are: Where, when, how, and what? These are the questions that any journalist would ask about any story.

The second question that I would like to put to you is one to which I am not sure I have an answer. What right do we have to report on it, anyway? Where does our authority as journalists describing such situations come from? When we discuss these things, we poke our noses into them. Why is it justified for me, as a British journalist, to go into Pakistan or northern Sri Lanka or Bangladesh to talk about their war crimes tribunal? What right do I have to do this? Often, I am told by people who refuse me a visa, or people who do not want me to go to a particular place, that it is not obvious why I should be allowed to go there. Why should I be allowed to report on that country? I think a good answer is that you represent the public, you represent those who demand transparency in everything in daily life, and that includes transparency when violence is committed.

There is a reason why it we need transparency; because then we can limit the ways in which violence takes place, and there can be rules of war and other details that the Red Cross talks about. If you have transparency, perhaps you will not have war crimes so often. If you have transparency, perhaps innocent civilians will not be killed as much as they would be otherwise. But there is no point in having transparency if we do not have observers.

So I think the justification for our reporting on wars and on conflict and violence stems from the powerlessness of our leaders and our viewers, and not from the powerful. You do not have the right to go into conflict because the governments tell you that you can, or that you should. If the governments tell you not to go, you should go anyway; but it is easy to say that. But the right, the duty, of a journalist is to be covering violence and talking about violence.

Just because we are present, does that mean we should therefore discourage the violence from happening? That is my third question. I think—uncomfortably for us as journalists—the
answer is not always yes. It may be that the presence of journalists or the presence of journalism, of TV coverage, may well encourage violence to happen and encourage conflicts. I think we should be honest about that.

If I just run through a few things that come to my mind from the last three years that I have been involved in reporting on violence, it is pretty clear that the mere fact of journalists’ presence has led to more violence. I am thinking of the Tibetan monk who immolated himself in Delhi a couple of years ago, in front of a bank of TV reporters and photographers. He did not choose to burn himself quietly in a village in the middle of nowhere; he chose to do it in front of the world’s media.

I think of Al Shabaab of Nairobi, which attacked a shopping mall three weeks ago. There is no strategic gain in attacking a lot of innocent people in a shopping mall. The reason for doing so was to gain publicity. The answer may be this—the purpose of doing this was to get attention, to get publicity, to get propaganda to work.

Take the case of Muzaffarnagar again. What was the point of the Jat–Muslim violence? Was it random, or was it due to deep-seated hatred or tension between the communities? Was it possibly the politicians, who thought that when this is widely reported, they would get political mileage from it? So we should immediately be aware that violence may be intended for our audience, for our eyes, or perhaps even directed at us.

I covered the Maoist attack in Chhattisgarh where 28 Congress leaders were massacred as they drove through a forest in Bastar. I went down there a couple of days afterwards; even before the National Investigating Team came along, I saw the evidence of bullet-ridden trees, bloodstains on the ground, etc. Why did they do that? What was the point of the Maoists attacking the Congress leaders in Chhattisgarh? Again, I think that it had a propaganda value. They thought it would be reported, so that we would believe the Maoists are still a strong force.
Just as an aside, I have to respectfully disagree with some of the analysis that my friend put forward. I do not think that this region is necessarily plunging into a spiral of worsening violence.

The Maoists, for example, are showing themselves less capable of striking than they have been in previous years. So when the attack in Chhattisgarh happened, it was propaganda-driven; it was to try and prove to people that they are still relevant and still powerful, when the truth may be that they are perhaps not as powerful as they once were.

The fourth question touches upon the subject of impartiality. Are we supposed to be impartial as journalists? My very first trip as a foreign correspondent was in 1998 to Sierra Leone during the civil war there. I landed in Freetown and I was quite scared; it was an uncertain situation. But we drove out to a room where the Indian peacekeepers were stationed—and the Indian peacekeepers will remember this, it was on the frontline, where the rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), was active.

All through that reporting trip, I spoke to children, the victims of abuses and atrocities, which left me in absolutely no doubt that I was partial in this conflict. I knew to the bottom of my heart that the rebels were absolutely wrong, and deserved to be beaten up. They were using children to kill other children and they were abusing all sorts of people. The government was also corrupt and terrible; they had their own problems, which was also why the rebels were able to flourish in that state.

I did not leave Sierra Leone thinking that I was pretty impartial to what happened there; when I left, I wrote articles saying that we have a duty to intervene, that the rebels needed to be destroyed, and that Charles Taylor, who was backing the rebels and making money out of the diamonds, needed to be arrested. I am delighted to report that he has been arrested, and he will be going to prison very soon.

But I was not impartial; I did not come out of that experience thinking that both sides were equally bad. I think it is a mistake
on the part of a journalist to think that s/he can be impartial. Yes, you have to be honest about how you gather your facts; you have to have integrity in what you do, and the way you arrive at your judgments and how you conduct your mediation. You are mediating; you are the media. You are not just randomly putting facts out there. You are choosing which facts to put out and choosing which story to tell.

If you want an example, you can consider how *The Guardian* has covered the Edward Snowden leaks on the NSA, and compare that with how Wikileaks had published the reams of information directly on the Internet. In one case, *The Guardian* was mediating the facts in a way that others can understand; and in the case of Wikileaks, a huge quantity of material was dumped in the open for everyone to discuss. So *The Guardian* was doing journalism, while Wikileaks was not. There is a fundamental difference here—in the process of mediating, you are being partial and you should be partial in a right way; but it is very hard to be completely impartial.

The last question that I would ask is one for which I have almost no answer: What about the new media? I suspect that most representatives of the media here are, like me, from the traditional media—they are from newspapers, they are broadcasters, from TV, etc. But the truth, as the Western media certainly knows, is that the traditional forms are in dire straits at the moment. It is difficult to imagine the funding model surviving in a very robust way for many more years. The new technology, the rise of the Internet, of blogs, of Twitter, and so on, is a threat to traditional forms of the media.

The rise of powerful states that use the media themselves, the rise of state-backed companies, whether it is the Chinese or the British or governments in the Middle East, has led to new forms of media. How we in the traditional media respond to this is one question that might form part of future conferences. You will need to have the new media present as well, because increasingly, anyone can use the tools of the media.
Why do we know about the torture in Abu Ghraib in Iraq? It is because the prison officers themselves took photos and broadcast them. How do we know about war crimes in Sri Lanka in 2009? How do we know that the prisoners were executed with their hands tied behind their backs? How do we know that Prabhakaran’s son was shot dead by Sri Lankan soldiers? It is because the soldiers themselves filmed it and let those films get out. So, who exactly is a journalist is increasingly becoming an uncertain question. There is no clear line between the journalist and the non-journalist, because the soldier may, in effect, be working as a sort of journalist as well.

As far as the terrorist is concerned—think of Bin Laden and the images of him in Abottabad, sitting in his room watching videos of himself, the videos that Al Qaeda had made; he was obsessed with propaganda, and there are units within Al Qaeda that do propaganda work. We need to think carefully about who we consider a journalist, and whether there is some clear line between the good journalist—the one in this room, the one who follows the laws and understands the subtle differences—and the bad journalist, the one who is working for terrorists or for governments.

So there are difficult questions to answer. I am not going to offer any conclusions, but I think there may be questions that you might want to address in the coming days.
It is really a challenge to be the Vice Chancellor of a multidisciplinary university, which boasts of offering more than 200 courses in over 65 academic disciplines. And then you have to preside over and inaugurate seminars, conferences and workshops across the disciplines, and you have to pretend to be an expert on each of these areas.

The task is made all the more difficult when you are fourth in the line of speakers, and you follow Mr Adam!

So, first of all, I welcome all of you to this university, which is moving towards 100 years of its existence. The university can, in a way, be said to have taken birth because of the conflict around it.

Mahatma Gandhi’s call for non-cooperation was, in fact, the reason for Jamia coming into existence, in an attempt to offer secular education to all Indians, especially Muslims. So it was as part of the mission and a part of the movement that Jamia became a university, rather than being incorporated as one. That stage came much later; in fact, the university survived for 42 years without a penny from the government, and was run with community resources. It was only in 1962 that, for the first time,
Jamia was recognised as a Deemed University by the University Grants Commission, and started receiving government funds. The university not only survived, but also made some very innovative breakthroughs, like the introduction of the basic education that was so close to Mahatma Gandhi. Then, in 1938, it established a faculty of education and created an institute of rural services to provide trained human resources to the National Community Development Programme, which was started in 1951. The university was also instrumental in the creation of one of the partner institutions of this programme, AJK Mass Communication Research Centre, in the early 1980s, when the electronic media in India was present only in the form of the daily two-hour broadcast by Doordarshan.

So the visionary in Kidwai could see the potential of the media, particularly the electronic media, and then establish an institution to provide training and develop strategies. We will also be discussing these over the next two days.

We have already heard—and we would all perhaps agree—that reporting of conflict is a hazardous and a very dangerous proposition. It completely outweighs the glamour and power usually associated with the profession of journalism.

The number of deaths, kidnappings, and other forms of violence against journalists has been on an increase. The vulnerability grows further if we look at the increasing number of freelance journalists who are venturing into conflict reporting, because there is no institutional or organisational protective support or back-up available to them.

They are the most vulnerable. The conflicts have also become more complicated. If you look at the variety of conflicts, you will see their resource base and their economics; the conflicts around an assertion of a particular identity; the conflict that emanates from a desire for a separate land, or the creation—and resistance to the creation—of a separate state (which is currently the case in India); the conflict surrounding the political use or abuse of
religion; conflicts over the sharing of water and other natural resources. So there are huge varieties and causes of conflicts, all of which make the task of reporting very hazardous and difficult.

How do we regulate it? What is right and what is wrong? What are the principles that we should adhere to? What is the ethical regime that we should subscribe to? Which is the appropriate agency that can decide for us? Or is self-regulation the best answer? When senior journalists like you sit in this hall and debate the various aspects, it is a process of developing a self-regulatory mechanism as well as a strategy to deal with the dangers and ethics of conflict reporting.

Having said that, I would also say that as a principle, we used to believe that self-regulation is the best solution for professions. But unfortunately, during the past four-and-a-half years, while dealing with the various councils that regulate different professions and disciplines—such as the Council of Architecture, the Dental Council of India, and the All India Council for Technical Education—I must admit that my experience has been awful. I found that most of these councils have developed vested interests, which serve the office bearers rather than the followers of the professions.

I do not know what the answer is. But in principle, I would still prefer conflict reporting and the conduct of journalists to be regulated by the profession rather than by any outside agency, because the former is equipped—they have the experience; they know the sensitivities; they know the intricacies involved in the conduct of the profession.

Another important aspect, which has been pointed out by one of the speakers, is: What is the meaning of reporting, what is the scope of reporting? Is it only talking about bringing facts to the knowledge of the reader, or viewer, or listener? Or it is also going beyond that? Can reporting be a part of conflict resolution in some ways? If that is the case, then it will have to go beyond ‘the actual reporting of the facts’.
Every conflict demands a different approach and strategy. For instance, I was discussing up, particularly Muzaffarnagar, with Professor Obaid yesterday—there have been small riots throughout the past one year in up, which have gone completely unreported, perhaps deliberately, on the part of the press. Then we find the Muzaffarnagar riots being reported extensively, with the number of casualties on either side, the names of the communities, leaders, etc. I do not know whether they are right, whether this has really helped to assuage the hurt of the people, or whether it has contributed to the situation flaring up further. This is for the journalists themselves to decide.

But the point I am trying to make here is that it puts immense responsibility on this particular profession. The immense potential of the new media, which Mr Roberts has very rightly pointed to, and the very little control over this new media is also a very important aspect.

For the first time, perhaps, one of the most heinous forms of violence occurred in Gujarat in 2002, which continues to mar Indian society and be used by political parties to settle their own political ambitions.

Still, we cannot take away the fact that that incident dealt a major blow to the secular fabric of this country, which we still have to recover from. For the first time, the role of the new media, as well as that of the conventional media, was very positive. That was one of the reasons why the situation did not become even uglier than what it actually was.

With regard to the impartiality or partiality of the profession, the coverage and the reporting, I would tend to agree with Mr Roberts that there is nothing in the name of value neutrality. It is very difficult for a human being to be value neutral. We tend to take sides. The only difference would be that we are conscious of the side we are choosing, and the reasons for choosing that particular side. To be completely objective is difficult, particularly
for a profession like journalism. You have to take a stand or a position on a particular issue. That is what I believe.

At Jamia, we welcome such dialogues and engagements, and I extend an open invitation to all of you as a group or as individuals to come and visit us whenever you want, to make use of our library, and to have discussions with our faculty and students; we will be most happy to host you and extend whatever modest facilities we have in the university.
VOTE OF THANKS

MARY WERNTZ
Head, ICRC Regional Delegation on India, Bhutan and The Maldives

Good morning, everyone. Professor S. M. Sajid, Vice Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia, Mr Adam Roberts, South Asia Bureau Chief of The Economist, Professor Obaid Siddiqui, Director of the Mass Communication Research Centre at Jamia Millia Islamia, Professor Tasneem Meenai, Director of the Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, distinguished editors, senior editors from the Asia region, members of the diplomatic community, academics, journalists, Red Cross colleagues, dear students, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to welcome all of you to the Senior Editors’ Conference in New Delhi, which the ICRC is very proud to co-host along with our partners.

The relationship between the ICRC, the journalists, and this region is a deep one. You will recall stories of the injured at the Mirwai Hospital in Kandahar, news of missing persons in Nepal, medical evacuations in the North of Sri Lanka, and the earthquake response out of Muzaffarabad in Pakistan. The ICRC has been working in this region for many years, carrying out its humanitarian mission, like it does in over 80 countries across the
globe. As per the responsibilities that States have given to the ICRC through the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols, the ICRC has been assisting persons affected by armed violence and promoting international humanitarian law.

Our daily working tools—and here, I emphasis tools—include the principles of neutrality and independence. Interestingly, journalists who work in situations of conflict and violence also need to function under neutrality and independence. This is of necessity, in order for the journalists and the humanitarians to have access to conflict situations.

Thus, humanitarians and journalists working in conflict shall not only have the physical space, the actual battlefields of the world, but they also share similar tools while working in these places.

The principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality have been the backbones of the work of the ICRC for the past 150 years. You will note here that I include impartiality when speaking about humanitarian actors, and two of our speakers, the Vice Chancellor and Mr Adam, also spoke about impartiality and the different ways in which it is viewed in the field of journalism.

Unlike the conflicts of the past, the long ago past, today it is civilians who are most affected in terms of casualties, death, and disruptions in their lives and livelihoods. As wars and violence evolve, the media has also evolved, as has the ICRC. We now work in modern theatres of warfare, where a click is the new trigger and viruses, the new explosives.

As a response to armed crisis, the ICRC sees today’s media as being not just the messenger, but also a vital catalyst in shaping how the world responds to human suffering. Journalists today do not allow us to look away from the suffering; rather, they bring it right into our living rooms.

The 24×7 TV news, Internet newspapers, social media, the blogosphere, these are all bringing the direct rituals and the various actors into one virtual theatre—be it the armed group holed up in a cave or hi-tech armies, stranded civilians or the responding
agencies. It is by and large thanks to the media and the supersonic information transfer, that organisations like the ICRC have been pushed to respond more rapidly.

Recognising this relationship, I am very happy to say that this Senior Editors’ Conference, co-hosted by the ICRC, has managed to attract some of the best journalistic minds from South Asia and the Asia Pacific to discuss issues vital to today’s world.

We, at the ICRC, have been engaging with journalists from 2006, when the very first conference of this sort was held here in New Delhi, followed by the conference in Dhaka in 2007. Another conference was held in Manila, in 2011, and this year, it is back in New Delhi.

I announce now that the conference next year is slated for Tokyo. I would like to warmly thank our partners in this endeavour, the AJK Mass Communication Research Centre and the Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution.

I would also thank our presenters, panelists, moderators, senior editors, legal personalities, and academics from the region for coming from as far as Australia and Afghanistan, for taking time out of their busy schedules to travel to Delhi, and for sharing with all of us their views.

Finally, I would like to thank the Jamia Millia Islamia University for all their support, from the very beginning of this initiative. Thank you, Mr Vice Chancellor.

I would like to close with the words of a famous war photographer, James Nachtwey, who said the following:

Photographers and journalists are many things—historians, dramatists, artists and humanitarians. As journalists, one of the tasks is to reveal the unjust and the unacceptable so that the images become an element in the process of change. In this way, photography and journalism are an important compliment to the work of humanitarian organisations.

Ladies and gentlemen, once again I would warmly welcome all of you to this regional gathering.
THE BALANCING ACT

Chairperson’s Remarks

Pamela Philipose

We are living in times of conflict. As Mr Adam Roberts mentioned in the morning we do not know where conflict begins and ends—the conflict is with us. That is the realisation that should inform us as professionals as we tackle the challenges of our jobs in this situation.

Even as we speak, we know there is tension on the border; we know that Muzaffarnagar is not quite settled. Even as we speak, we know that in Nairobi we have been witness to events/developments. How do we see these issues?

Somalia is another place; and there is so much tension in Iraq. Many of the conflicts of the past 10 years continue to be with us and inform us. In fact, none of us is spared because as members of the global community, it comes home to each one of us. So keeping that in mind, I will now request our speakers to throw a little more light on conditions from the field, so that we could look for answers to the questions raised in the first session.

Now, to start the process, I would like to invite Mr M. R. Narayan Swamy, Chief News Editor of IANS, a well-known news service.
Mr Narayan Swamy is a personal friend. He took to journalism in 1978, shortly after his graduation from the University of Delhi. He has worked with the United News of India, Agence France Press and The Strait Times in Singapore. He is now based in New Delhi and is the author of several books, including three famous books on the Sri Lankan conflict.

I will request him to give us examples of the situations and try and answer some of the questions raised in the first session, including questions like: How do journalists really work? Are they supposed to be impartial? What is their role when confronted with conflict reporting?

Can Journalists be Impartial Observers in Today’s Conflicts?

M. R. Narayan Swamy

I have been in journalism for almost 35 years and it has been a very interesting phase. If you do not take journalism merely as a job, it is a great profession to be in. If you are passionate about it, this is a fantastic profession.

The subject that I have been asked to address is: ‘Can journalists be impartial observers in today’s conflicts?’ In some ways this question presupposes that people in the past have been impartial; and so the question being asked is, do they continue to be impartial.

For journalists, there are times when you have to be independent and objective all the time; but you need not be impartial every time. In fact, there are occasions in situations of conflict when you should not be impartial.

Broadly speaking, we come across two kinds of conflicts—one is what we call internal conflict and the other is external conflict. At the news agency for which I work, we cover both kinds of conflicts. There are perennial conflicts on the India–Pakistan
border. While convering them reporters tend to immediately go to their sources. These sources could be the Defence Ministry or the military or the intelligence agencies. The moment you speak to these sources, you are effectively shutting out the other opinions. There are a lot of journalists who think that it is their duty to be patriotic.

Let me give you an example. When I took to this profession, over a period of time we used to mention that J&K (Jammu and Kashmir) is a disputed territory, which it is. When I joined IANS, many of my colleagues began to ask me why I did this. Why do you write this? According to them, J&K belonged to India, so why did I keep writing that there is a dispute about it?

Believe it or not, this row within the office lasted till July 2001 when, as you remember, the Agra Summit took place between Musharraf and Vajpayee. That was the day when I went and asked one of the seniors who used to object to the term ‘disputed territory’ what they were going to talk about in Agra, what the main subject was. He said, ‘J&K and related issues.’ I asked then why they should discuss Kashmir at all, if it is not disputed. That was the turning point in my office. From that day, they ceased to ask that question.

There are journalists/reporters who come to us and ask, ‘Do you think we should write it in this manner, do you think it will look nice from the Indian point of view?’ I tell them, if this is what has happened, then write it. If we as a State, or as a group of individuals or as an entity as a nation, think that we have done wrong, then it has to be reported. Do not worry about patriotism. Forget about patriotism, I find a section of the media completely jingoistic. What is important to realise is that a minimum amount of impartiality has to be maintained.

When I say a ‘minimum amount of impartiality’, I mean that if there is a conflict zone, you have to try and locate the ‘other’ version in your stories. It may not always be possible to have it. You may not have a bureau or a correspondent in Islamabad, if it comes to the India–Pakistan conflict, but in today’s age, it is very easy to
get what the Pakistanis are saying and thinking; and their version has to go in every copy if you want to be impartial.

Although I have some problems, I belong to the old school of journalism and I belong to the print media, and those who are from the print media have different notions of, and perspectives on, what is broadly known as the electronic media. Nevertheless, the electronic media fares a shade better when it comes to impartial and multiple opinions because, apart from providing news, they bring in these discussions where they rope in people from opposing viewpoints, and because of this, even if all the news bulletins have been partial, you get to have a broader perspective which I feel is sometimes lacking in the print media.

Let me also add that whatever I say may not be true for every section of the media or for every journalist; these are broad assumptions that I am making on the strength of the reporting that I have seen over a period of time.

Look at the Naxalite attack. Let us assume that there is a Naxalite attack and they have killed security forces or politicians—as has happened in Chhattisgarh recently—or the reverse, with Maoists being killed. Since most newspapers and agencies have something called the beat system, this immediately comes into play; so the moment there is an attack by the Maoists, or Maoists have been killed in a distant place where actual field reporting is not possible, the person who gets the prime slot is the one who will be covering the Home Ministry, or what is known as the Interior Ministry in different countries. What are his sources? They are invariably the Home Ministry, the Home Ministry officials, the security officials, and probably the intelligence agencies. He obviously has a line. There is nothing wrong with reporting this; but it cannot be possible to not report the other side at all.

By the time a reporter goes to the field three or four days later, the story is dead. It is possible that the story done three to four days later is a more comprehensive and a better story, but a story, as you all know, dies every 24 hours. I sometimes get the feeling
that in the name of impartiality, what many journalists tend to do is actually put on a veneer of partiality. We feel that by putting in a particular paragraph or a particular quote or a particular sentence, the other side has been covered, when actually it has not. You cannot have a report where one side is being represented—let us say that out of 20 paras, 16–17 paras concentrate on one side and one para is given to the other side—and you consider that fair reporting. No, I do not think that this is fair reporting.

On the subject of fair and unfair reporting, in Muzaffarnagar, for instance, I would like to take the side of the victims. I would take the side of those who are in the conflict zone, who I feel actually are the victims, and not necessarily waste my time and resources doing a story on it which involves talking to people who are the aggressors.

Then there is another sort of problem. I have been born and brought up in Delhi and the language that I speak best is Hindi, although my mother tongue is Tamil. While reporting on Sri Lanka for example, there was always this feeling: Should a Tamil be allowed to cover a conflict in Sri Lanka? Will he be partial or will he be biased? I was always clear for a very long time—and many people who knew me personally know this too—that I had no faith in the LTTE. I knew that the LTTE would one day take the Tamil community for a ride. That is exactly what happened. Even after the LTTE was finished, I still spoke to some of the LTTE operatives who survived, and who had escaped and come to India, and they said that the situation of the Tamil community in 2009 was far worse than it had been in 1983.

I have been to all parts of Sri Lanka, from the North where Prabhakaran was born right to the rock bottom, to the other provinces where Sinhalese mass insurgencies were active. There was a time when I was taken away by the IPKF. They thought I was a Sri Lankan, and I was subjected to what was known as an ‘identification parade’. It was in a place called Vavuniya, 254 kms north of Colombo. Just imagine, it was a town; but there was a
curfew every day after 6 pm, pitch darkness, with no street lights functioning. Everyone went to bed by 7 pm. I was taken out of a little hotel in Vavuniya town; there were several others in the hotel, and we were made to squat outside. The ladies were asked (this was by the Indian soldiers) to return to their rooms. The men were then asked to form a queue and in batches of three, we were brought outside the hotel complex.

Here, there was an Indian Army jeep, in which was a soldier and a Tamil militant, who belonged to the group opposed to the LTTE. He was popularly known as mukamudi in Tamil, which means a ‘masked person’. He would wear a mask with two little openings for the eyes so that nobody would be able to recognise him. They were sitting in the jeep in complete darkness, with the headlight of the jeep trained on the people. In batches of three, the people were asked to stand in front of the jeep headlights; the job of the guy sitting with the soldier was to say whether any of them was from the LTTE. The moment he said ‘no’, the soldier would signal and say in Hindi, ‘inko chhod dho’. The three persons would then go back, and the next three would come in. It so happened that I was among the last three. I stood before the jeep; obviously the guy would have said, ‘no, none of them is from the LTTE’.

Just to add some colour, let me also say that I was wearing a lungi and that I did not know there would be a check in the hotel. I was preparing to go to bed. Fortunately, as I came into the room, my thinking faculties were working, and I picked up my Press card and put it in my pocket. That really helped, as I told you just now.

So finally they asked us to go back. I saw an officer standing near me. I could see his nameplate. His name was Surinder Singh. I could also see that he was obviously an officer and not a soldier.

I stood for a moment and then suddenly turned to him and asked, ‘Aap Haryana se nahin hain?’ I tell you, the guy could have dropped dead. He froze—not just because of the question, but
because of the accent. You read in novels about mouths being ‘open like a goldfish’; I saw that for the first time. He stared at me, and I said, ‘I am from Delhi.’ He could not believe it. He asked me what I was doing there, and I said, ‘I am a journalist’. I asked him whether I should show him my card; and then I showed him my Press card. It had the stamp of the Government of India on it. He told me that I should have informed him earlier. I replied that I had heard about cordon and search operations, and that I actually wanted to see what they do. And I was happy to have done so. But he told me that I had made a big mistake; had the informant even mistakenly identified me as belonging to the LTTE, they would have hit me first with the rifle butt and then asked questions. Obviously, God was on my side.

Pamela Philipose (Chair)

Thank you very much. The last example explains what exactly a journalist is—a human being, first of all. We are just human beings. We represent a larger community; that is why we are there. We get power from the fact that we represent the larger society. We also represent certain values. I do not think that we are that impartial, perhaps; but we should be impartial in terms of our conduct, and our espousing of certain values and norms.

The International Humanitarian Law reflects many of these values, which I think every journalist has to internalise. Many issues came up during Mr Narayan Swamy’s brief presentation. I wish we had more time to listen to him, but one important issue that I would like to flag at this time is that of the source—how it actually produces the final story that we write. If we are going to be blinkered by our sources and if we keep other opinions away, then our stories will necessarily be skewed and biased. Therefore it is important to understand the value of various sources.

The other issue that I would like to flag is the importance of not seeing yourself as defined by national interests, in the way the
The Situation in Sri Lanka

Shamindra Ferdinando

Sri Lanka has been and is a victim of the wrong Indian policy. Once, the Indian Foreign Secretary, Mr J. N. Dixit, in his book *Makers of India’s Foreign Policy from Raja Ram Mohan to Yashwant Sinha*, acknowledged India’s responsibility in promoting terrorism in neighbouring Sri Lanka. During the deployment of the Indian army in Sri Lanka, the Indian High Commission remained the authority on the media. The Sri Lankan military was confined to the barracks. The local media was subjected to restrictions by the Indian High Commission in Colombo, as well as by respective Indian army commands in Jaffna and other areas. The Indian army targeted the Jaffna-based media.

Let me quote Dixit’s memoir:
The two foreign policy decisions on which the then Premier Indira Gandhi could be faulted are: her ambiguous response to the Russian intrusion into Afghanistan and her giving active support to Sri Lankan Tamil militants. Whatever the criticisms about these decisions, it cannot be denied that she took them on the basis of her assessments about India’s national interests.

But today, we often hear a section of the media, the NGOs, and others say that you have to ignore the national interest; Dixit realised that the decision was taken at India’s highest level, and that was the main reason for India to destabilise Sri Lanka. This came from the one-time Foreign Secretary.

Dixit asserted that the Indian intervention was a necessity due to what he called Sri Lanka’s security connections with the US, Israel and Pakistan. The veteran diplomat expressed the opinion that India’s move should be examined against the backdrop of the global as well as regional, political and military environment that existed between 1980 and 1984.

Interestingly, two of the sponsors of the event we are at today launched their projects in India during 1982. The ICRC set up base in India in response to trouble in Jammu and Kashmir, and the AJK Mass Communication Research Centre, too, commenced work in 1982, just one year before Sri Lanka exploded in the immediate aftermath of the LTTE killing thirteen soldiers in a coordinated landmine and firearms attack. The international media never examined the accountability on the part of India in launching a terror project in Sri Lanka. The UN and other international organisations, including the ICRC, turned a blind eye to what was going on in Sri Lanka. Had the media gone on the offensive, the situation would have been different.

The media, as well as their patrons/sponsors, were not bothered as long as the LTTE was able to achieve its military targets—whatever the cost. The use of child soldiers did not bother them, although the UN and the ICRC made half-hearted attempts to discourage terrorists from using children as cannon fodder.
I remember the UN and the ICRC having discussions with the LTTE in this regard on many occasions, leading to an agreement between the UN and the LTTE in May 1998. However, child recruitment continued unabated. During a Norwegian-arranged ceasefire from 2002 to 2003, the LTTE invited senior members of the Illankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi, ITAK, to witness the passing out of recruits from schools. A section of the media promoted the recruitment campaign. The international community took no notice of the high-handed LTTE action. In fact, the international community and the media sprang into action only when they realised the LTTE was on the verge of collapse on the northern front in January 2009. Until then, a section of the media had predicted a massive LTTE counter-attack on the army in December 2008–January 2009, which could have led to the swift collapse of the Sri Lankan Army on the northern front.

In January 2009, a prominent journalist declared that the war could go either way, while another discussed an elaborate counter-attack that could pave the way for the encirclement of the Sri Lankan Army on the northern front. Then there was another media expert who called for a negotiated settlement in early 2007, soon after the LTTE fired artillery at a group of foreign envoys in the Eastern Province. He asserted that a negotiated settlement was nothing but a necessity, as both parties lacked the strength to secure an absolute victory. Today, he plays a different tune. Of course, he is now in the Sri Lankan government.

The media is influenced by the government, and obviously, also influences whatever government is in power in Colombo. Of course, the government offers journalists several things—laptops, foreign trips, etc. At the same time, you must realise that journalists are controlled by powerful, influential sections of foreign embassies and NGOs. There is a lot of money around, and so you can buy people. Today, reading the Indian media, I saw a former Indian General has made an allegation that the Indian Army bought Indian politicians. This has been the case since 1947.
So if you can buy Indian politicians, you can buy politicians in the UK or in my country too. Journalists can be bought; they can be influenced by money and other privileges. So when people talk about impartiality, independence and transparency, you must realise that the State and the other governments in power overseas ensure reports; they play a huge role. That is why there is a difference in the international media coverage of Bahrain and Syria. The West will not permit anybody to destabilise Bahrain as long as the American fleet is based there; they need that place.

Pamela Philipose (Chair)
You are talking about geo-political influence. I want to ask you to be a little more specific. One has heard that within Sri Lanka itself, especially in the post-2009 phase, the State has become very powerful. One of the ways in which it has exercised power has been through attempts to control the media. I think this does influence the way the reportage of the post-conflict situation was conducted. So I was wondering if you have something to say on this.

Shamindra Fernando
Today, the LTTE is represented by the UK-based Global Tamil Forum. Whatever statement is issued from London by the GTF is covered on the first page of the newspapers. All their statements, all the allegations against the Sri Lankan government, the military, the President and his brother, are reported. I do not believe that we are under pressure to carry any particular story. There is a huge media operation against one country. Up to 2009, until they fell, the LTTE could do anything with the Sri Lankan Army; they had child recruitments, and raised funds in India, the UK, and in other countries. But the day they realised they could not stop the army, they started playing a different tune. People who never
issued statements against child recruitments are today shedding crocodile tears, obviously for money.

One simple example of how the media influenced the situation is this. You may have seen the coverage involving a group of Sri Lankans trying to overthrow the Maldives government in early November 1988. It says that the LTTE raided the Maldives and the Indian Army then came to the Maldives. However, the LTTE is not the real story; it was some other group of Sri Lankans, trained by the Government of India, who took money from a rich Maldivian, took two boats from my country to the Maldives, and tried to overthrow the government. Luckily, that day India intervened and put an end to that incident. What would have happened had those Sri Lankan killed the Maldivian President in 1988?

Pamela Philipose (Chair)

We will throw this open later. I want to end with this observation. There are certain known unknowns. In our handling of these known unknowns, we have to evolve certain strategies and understandings which we perhaps have not thought seriously about. So there is a bit of distance that is normally enjoined on journalists; it is important to protect that. Very often, there is pressure on you to collapse yourselves with the most powerful, whether it is outside the country—as Shamindra has suggested—or within, whether it is routed through money or influence, or whether it is about survival in certain contexts. How do we protect ourselves? We can perhaps discuss this question as the debate continues.

As far as the IPKF operations are concerned, there has been enough learning in this country to arrive at an understanding of this. There were many disasters inherent in that operation. We have many commentators, and people in the media, who have taken a position of criticism. So let us hope we can further this so that we will really talk about the ability to communicate what we
deem as truths, and which are very difficult sometimes to ascertain in emotional situations.

Now we will move on to Afghanistan and other regions under the grip of an unending conflict. We are fortunate to have with us Hashmatullah Radfar, Chief Editor of Nukhost Daily, based in Kabul.

He began his career with a “Good Morning Afghanistan” radio programme (2006–12), on which he worked as reporter, analyst and presenter, presiding over political human rights round tables and investigative programmes. He has designed and created a series of investigative programmes around international humanitarian laws in Afghanistan.

I hope he will tell us a little bit about being a journalist in a city like Kabul, which is always on the edge of the abyss.

Non-state Actors and Tough Information Delivery in Afghanistan

Hashmatullah Radfar

I have listed seven points for this presentation, starting from political opposition, ideological and ethnic parties, civil society organisations and NGOs, economic institutions and drug smugglers, insurgent and non-responsible armed groups, ISAF and NATO, and media diversification in Afghanistan. I will explain these in detail.

However, an analysis of the situation, and of the information delivery process and challenges in post-conflict countries, requires similar mechanisms and trends. But Afghanistan, which has not completely emerged from conflict, needs to pay attention to the principles of standing against crisis or the vulnerability of the situation that you are delivering information from. After 2001, the military, political and economic presence of 41 countries combating terrorism and Afghanistan’s new constitution paved the way towards freedom of speech and widespread media activities.
Under this system, all parties involved in three decades of war, including Communists, the Mujahedin, and even the Taliban, could define their activities in line or in opposition with the new situation. Now Afghanistan has 70 TV networks, 150 radio stations, 500 print media organisations, and hundreds of websites.

The biggest challenges that we face in Afghanistan, especially in the media, have to do with insecurity, lack of independence, and lack of professionalism.

Lack of independence could relate to one of these—the Afghan government, foreign assistance, traders, the power and economic corruption network, and/or jihadi leaders.

The political opposition is using the media to its advantage. Adhering to the constitution and the Mass Media Law of Afghanistan, the Opposition created its own TV and radio channels and newspapers. It criticised government policies and participated in media debates and discussions.

Such an approach helped to promote a new kind of political ethics, with talking and thinking replacing the killing of persons.

Another aspect of non-state actors in Afghanistan is ideological movements and tribal and ethnic parties.

As you know, the conflicts in Afghanistan started in 1928 and have had several phases: one phase was between the Left ideology, right traditional extremists and moderate religious-political armed parties, or Mujahidins. The Mujahidin State government (1992–96) formed another phase. The third phase was from 1996 to 2001, and yet another phase has been from 2001 till now.

Since the media functions according to the latest methods of reporting, they are in conflict with most of the wishes and aims of tribal-ideologist parties. Also very strong in Afghanistan are civil society organisations and NGOs. But the difference in interests and approaches among these organisations with respect to various factors like peace and reconciliation, justice and governance, has created challenges for journalists. With respect to peace and the reconciliation process with the Taliban, some civil society
organisations emphasise justice and addressing war victims, while others insist on unconditional talks with the armed opponents of the government. Information delivery depends upon the media policy, personal approach, political, or even tribal-ethnic, lingual or ideological relations of the media owners and their high-ranking personnel. Although there are occasional talks regarding the social responsibility of the media, there is no specific media strategy with regard to the advocacy of human rights and the observation of international humanitarian law.

Now, I want to jump to another aspect—economic institutions and drug smugglers. Most of the banks, the huge investments made in economic enterprises, large trading companies, transport contracts for petroleum, logistic and construction materials for NATO forces and national security organisations, as well as some of the visual media, belong to high-ranking government officials, security forces, or Parliament members; and the drug smugglers have their share as well. Relations between economic actors and smugglers often lead to deception on the part of the journalist reporting the events, all in their own personal interests.

For example, in 2010, Samad Rohani, a reporter with Pajhwok news agency and the BBC, was found shot in the Helmand province of Afghanistan. The local security forces failed to arrest the perpetrators and later, Pajhwok news agency and BBC officials acknowledged that he might have been murdered due to his investigative reporting into drug trafficking in the Helmand province.

I will now come to NATO and ISAF, the most important non-government actors in Afghanistan. They help some of the Afghan media. More than three murders of reporters can be directly or indirectly laid at the doorsteps of NATO and ISAF forces. One of them was Ajmal Naqshbandi, who was beheaded by the Taliban when he went to Helmand province with the Italian journalist Gabrielle Mastroiacomo in 2007.
During the past few years, two important issues have arisen in the two provinces of Afghanistan. Apparently, international forces had burnt some parts of the Holy Quran, humiliating the religious beliefs of the Afghan people. This news led to great protests all around Afghanistan. Later, though, an investigation by an independent organisation showed that it was a conspiracy cooked up by regional intelligence agencies to get the common people to rise up against the international troops and the Afghan government.

Chair: You have raised some very key issues. The important thing is that in Afghanistan, we have a new country with a new Constitution, one that defends everyone’s right to freedom of expression. We have witnessed a conflict for almost three decades; but we are also seeing a situation where the Western and NATO forces are disengaging, although their presence and footprints will remain in your country for many more years to come. It will be interesting to learn of the role the media will play post the withdrawal. Perhaps later, you could talk about that.

The Constitutional right protecting the freedom of expression of every citizen is an important right. But it must also help throw light on the whole issue of war and the impact of conflict on ordinary lives. Since you have talked about how the media is influenced by various forces within the country—civil society groups powerfully supported by outside elements, the NATO or even the State itself—it would be interesting to know how the fledgling media develops the confidence to emerge as independent.

Professionalism is an issue in Afghanistan. But now we have a new generation of people, both men and women; women, too are coming out in numbers to report on the media. I think this is a good indication of the future.

I am glad that you touched upon the insecurity that journalists have faced in Afghanistan. We have been following this for many
years and it has been distressing; as has been the use of certain emotive issues in a cynical way, whether by the American Army or the local forces. For instance, there have been incidents of soldiers denigrating the Quran and the impact of such actions—how does the media respond to such things? One has to be very sensitive to the issue while at the same time trying to contain it from flaring up into a huge incident that consumes even larger forces.

With that, I would like to go on to the fourth speaker, Mr Augustine Anthuvan from Singapore. He is a senior TV journalist, forum moderator and media facilitator, and is currently working as Editor, International Desk, Channel News Asia Media Corporation. He also covers socio-political developments across Asia and beyond.

Four Stories

Augustine Anthuvan

I would like to share four stories with you. The first one comes from Hayley Slier, Golan Heights, and it is a story about the Druze. It is interesting because she took the trouble to tell the story of the Druze people who live both in Israel—and are born under the Israeli flag—and on the other side, in Syria.

I have not encountered the ICRC or any other NGO during my trips to Golan Heights. But in fact, my reports were centred on human stories, for which I did contact people for interviews. My impressions about the relations between international NGOs and the media are therefore more general.

Generally speaking, the organisations are available for interviews, and know how to deal with media requests. Usually there is a media spokesperson, who is media savvy. Their inputs tend to be factual, especially when commenting on a report or a new development, and sometimes can be frustrating because, in their attempt to not express an opinion, they end up saying
nothing. While this is not true of all international NGOs, a lot of them refuse to give opinions or comment on certain questions. Sometimes, NGOs have been helpful and have directed me to case studies and human interest stories. But they will not give interviews unless cleared to do so by their head offices. And head offices can be quite bureaucratic about providing permissions for interviews, and the process can take time.

I have seldom come across the ICRC or other international NGOs while doing a story; even if I had, they would not be available on the spot for media interviews.

International NGOs are not viewed as objective by all media outlets, and certainly not by all viewers. This is a challenge for them. If they wish to present themselves as an authoritative voice on a subject, they must keep this in mind. Most, if not all, of my interactions with international NGOs happen when I contact them; I feel there could be a better campaign from their side as we are all on their mailing lists. More needs to be done.

Television is a visual medium. Often, NGOs seem ignorant of the fact that we need pictures, that it is not enough to release new research only in print. For example, if they offer news information with human stories and profiles, we can go on locations and film these case studies. They can also help us facilitate those interviews during our research, which will make our jobs much easier.

Hayley is a newshound, and works for Channel News Asia from the Middle East. May Wong is one of our own reporters, based in Myanmar. I have only been in Kachin and I did not liaise with the Red Cross because they are not as active there as other organisations belonging to various faiths such as the Baptists, Anglicans and Catholics. These religious groups help to set up refugee camps and manage them because places of worship, such as churches or temples, are the first places people go to for help. So, by default, they started to help and rallied volunteers to provide aid to the refugees. They are particularly helpful because the government and other agencies sometimes cannot get to certain
areas while, being located within the areas, these religious groups make it less logistically challenging to offer help. Before flying to Kachin, I approached international organisations, but they were not forthcoming because I am a journalist, and they wanted me to seek permission from the government before they assisted me.

I decided to get around them and get to the camps directly on my own. The terrain is rough, especially since this was in the monsoon season. I could not just walk into a camp; I needed a volunteer, who could get the camp manager to allow me access. Some spoke the Kachin language and not the common Burmese language, and so I had to have someone else to translate.

Many did not want to talk and share their stories; so trying to gain their trust and making them comfortable within a short period of time was a difficult task.

The third story comes from Mindanao, Southern Philippines. I tried to maintain a balance—fair and factual reporting that is sensitive to the culture of Zamboanga. But Philippines right now is one of the most dangerous places to report from—the highest number of journalists have been killed in these regions. So personal safety continued to be my utmost concern while covering the conflict in Zamboanga. Contact with the conflicting parties is also vital, because it is through these contact persons that we can get a bigger picture of the stories and provide a broader analysis to let our viewers understand the stories as they happen, where they happen, and when they happen.

The post-conflict event is also a prime consideration. Often, the conflict is just the smaller story, with the more significant story being the post-conflict event. In some events, certain powerful persons take advantage of the conflict; I, too, have my own biases as a conflict journalist, although I tried to maintain my balance and report fairly.

The last story just came in on my phone; and is of a female journalist, who went to Sabah Borneo Island, very close to the Mindanao region. Being reporters, we want to get quickly to
ground zero and get some stories out. We do not have time to vet the driver who brings you there, the safety situation on the ground, or even look for a place to stay. So we rely on gut instinct, on information provided by reporters already on the ground. From the time we landed at the airport, we were taking a chance; the local taxi drivers were all Suluks, the ethnic community in the area. You had no idea which side they belonged to—that of the ‘sulu’ rebel or the Sabah government.

We negotiated with one driver on the spot, who took us closer to ground zero, his car looked all right. For those of you who have travelled, car breakdown is a very important consideration. The journey is long, phone reception is poor, and the sun sets early at 5.30 pm. So we spent a lot of time travelling in the dark through palm plantations; looking back, I placed my cameramen and myself in iffy positions several times during the trip. But if you keep moving from one place to another and do not loiter or mingle unnecessarily with the locals, it is all right. I was there with my cameramen just to report, not to take sides or interfere. So long as you make your intentions clear, be kind and friendly, and do your best, it should be all right.

There were several checkpoints—at some we were asked for our names and where we were heading, while at others we were just waved through. We cooperated as much as possible, but we never left the car. Of the four stories I shared, three of the reporters are women. Hayley, May Wong and Malesago all work in difficult conditions; the last one is the mother of two children. As a journalist based in Singapore, I knew what they went through because I have gone through those situations myself.

We are here to share our war stories; we have heard stories from our colleagues. What is important at this conference is to highlight the challenges, and how international organisations and the future journalists seated in this room can help to make a difference.

I want to leave you with two final points: the first is about words. While speaking at the Australian National University, the
ICRC chief took offence at the word ‘genocide’. It is a very strong word and was not used accurately; it was a great disrespect to the people who have truly experienced genocide. So when journalists in the newsroom use words, we have to do a fact check. We have to get the word right, and ensure that it means no disrespect to anyone who has died in ongoing conflicts.

The second point concerns education for the journalists. I am surrounded by journalists in my newsroom who are on an average 25 years of age; they are fresh out of universities and have not seen life yet. I respect them because they have chosen a very tough profession that does not pay well. So, contrary to popular opinion, you are in for the long haul, and you will have a tough job. But the rewards are plenty because my personal mantra is that the media can be a catalyst for change.

Rather than looking at what has gone wrong, we need to look at what has gone right. So for every journalist—especially the young ones in this room—I would recommend that education is fundamental; it began with Narayan Swamy’s stories and has worked its way down.

You need to learn about the country; you need to know about the people; you need to understand the communities. I do not accept Wikipedia submissions when my journalists do their research—even the founder of Wikipedia will tell you that it is not acceptable for university theses or journalistic discussions.

The last thing I did for my newsroom was to invite scholars from the Middle East Institute based in Singapore to educate our journalists on what is really happening, for example between the Israeli and the Palestinian people (who, by the way, are made up of people of all religions, contrary again to popular opinion).

Pamela Philipose (Chair)

Thank you, Augustine. That was very important. That was a bunch of the best practices that we can actually take away with us.
One of the key points that emerged is the importance of building trust. Now sources, of course, are dodgy. We never know their provenance. Unfortunately, journalists often do not have time to build trust and therefore, the whole attempt at news gathering is sometimes based on a lack of trust. That makes for serious problems sometimes in the course of reporting stories.

Fair reporting is a compass that you set for yourself and you hope it works, but sometimes it does not. It is there that the importance of educating yourself comes in, and I am glad you flagged that point.

The next speaker is a tv and film person, and will bring a new insight to the discussion. Professor Sabina Kidwai is Associate Professor of Film Editing at JMI. In the past 20 years, she has worked as an editor on a large number of independent documentaries. We know that very important documentaries have emerged from the JMI stable.

Sabina has done considerable research work and has co-authored two publications—Illusion of Power and Crossing the Sacred Line—on the subject of women and political participation. She has done a study on images of Muslim women for Wiscomp (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace), which I hope she will talk about.

The News on Television

Sabina Kidwai

I am the odd person here because I have always been interested in journalism, but I am not a journalist with any newspaper. I am an academic and I do a lot of work around TV and the print media; I look at representation and other issues.

I would like to talk about TV news because in the beginning, Swamy said that TV seems to give us many perspectives.

As an academic who studies television, I find that TV is a far
more problematic medium than the print media because print allows you to debate things, it allows a multiplicity of articles. That is not so with TV because we are dealing with a medium that works with visuals; visuals tend to stay in people's minds.

A lot of my work—especially my recent work—has been around terror attacks. Post-9/11, we have become aware of the entanglements of the environment and of economic insecurities. Terrorism has acquired an extensive mobility, accelerated primarily by the mass media. It is on and through TV that terror infuses and catalyses speculative discourses and constructs the enemy; and yet, TV delivers us from the spectre of endless terror and violence from places far and near, and also rescues us from the brink of chaos.

The basic issue I am talking about is, when you deal with any kind of attacks and/or terror situations, you find that the medium of television turns it into a spectacle. Media is built into the design of any political event, war or terror attack; and images, both professional and amateur, flood television and computer screens.

When there is an attack anywhere in the world, you get a lot of images; those images are the ones that stay in your mind. Take the Mumbai attack: What is the image that stays with us? The main image that comes to mind is that of the Taj Hotel and the Dome burning. That has become the signifier of the attack. Similarly, when it comes to any terror attack, you find TV channels making montages—a visual display with a whole lot of headlines. What it does eventually is make capsules for you of an event, and you feel that you have seen many such events. So the horror of it is also reduced. The other thing that happens—and which becomes very significant, especially when dealing with issues concerning minorities and marginalised communities—is the profiling of people who are allegedly involved in these attacks.

So even on these channels, there are profiles taken from police records. Where do these journalists source their information? They source it from police records, or from interviews of the people concerned. It becomes more dangerous when police records
become the basis of your reports. Between 2007 and 2009, there were unfortunately a number of terror attacks in India. The group that emerged and became very prominent was the IM. There was a series of programmes telecast on all Indian TV channels, in which they profiled these characters. They were supposed to be between the ages of 20–30, Muslim, and educated.

However, the entire TV coverage shows that in most cases, they could not even identify the person. They would fall back on re-enacted sequences, and a situation would be created in which an unknown enemy emerged, with his only identity being that of youth (between 20–30 years), education and religion (Muslim). This profiling continued, and became a problem. We have a series of attacks and subsequently hear that some arrests have been made; but this profiling has become a very important aspect of our representation whenever we deal with any kind of violence, especially terror attacks.

The second thing is that when we deal with any event, especially on a 24-hour TV channel, which needs continuous coverage, anything and everything can become a part of it. For instance, the Mumbai attack was a 60-hour long siege, but the TV time had to be fed with all kinds of stories. Nearly 60 people died at CST station, but it was never the focus of the story; the Taj Hotel continued to remain the focus. What was important was that the hotel was beautiful with stylish restaurants; you needed to talk about this because there was a status quo of sorts for a period of time. The media needs to fill in 24 hours; this visual requirement creates a situation where you constantly want news, and leads to the creation of a spectacle, which is not part of the print media. Somewhere down the line, we are losing out on arguments, debates, and news that has to be researched. The greatest casualty of television news is lack of research.
Discussion

Pamela Philipose (Chair)

Thank you. I am glad you underlined these aspects. I would like to quote the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. He talked about how—because TV news is a part of a larger whole—you will have a fashion show, then you will have war, and then move on to something else. What happens is that in the process, the horror of war is absolutely brushed aside because of the way it is presented. The whole idea is to make gripping TV; as you rightly emphasised, the spectacle.

Sabina Kidwai

If you look at the montages that came out before the Iraq war—for instance on the BBC, which is a channel with considerable credibility—they are visually very beautiful. You do not actually feel the horror of war. I know that in the Press, there are rules stating very clearly that you cannot show images that are too violent and horrific. But if you have watched your channels for the past four years, you will see that images of mutilation are now very common. We have become immune to them.

Pamela Philipose (Chair)

In fact, they say that in Vietnam, it was a quagmire of war; but we need important insights into the impact of the war on the lives of the soldiers, as much as on the people there on the field. We need to understand the theory behind what we are saying as well, and I am glad you brought that to the table.

Now, we have about half an hour left, and I presume we will be given extra time. We will throw the floor open to questions.
Discussion

Kamal Siddiqi

Thank you for the very enlightening presentations. I am thankful to the organisers for allowing us to interact with the journalism students. It is very good to be amongst them.

We talked a lot about impartiality and bias. I teach at Karachi University; I am a visiting lecturer there.

One of the things that I feel—and which I teach my students—is that all of us are biased; it is inherent in us. At the same time, one way to get around bias is getting all the versions when doing a story. You will still not be impartial, but you can at least do your story with all the versions. This is easier said than done; there are times when, by taking a version of events from a person or an organisation, you might actually be causing more damage—for instance, if you were to take the version of some militant organisation, you would actually be furthering their agenda. So this is a very open question.

Also, Mr Narayan Swamy pointed to the role of intelligence agencies, and Ms Pamela Philipose talked about sources. The golden rule here is that the sources should not be using you for their agenda; you should be using the sources to gather information, and you should be setting the agenda. But obviously—as Mr Narayan Swamy would know better than I—this does not always happen.

Mr Augustine talked about the expectations from the ICRC. On the one hand, it is very frustrating indeed to be confronted with somebody who knows something, but will not tell you; ICRC is very neutral in situations. But one area where I feel that the ICRC can do more is facilitation—taking journalists to areas of conflict or, better still, to areas where humanitarian disasters have occurred. There was a mention about the earthquake in Pakistan, for instance; ICRC could help to facilitate journalists more.

I have one question. When teaching journalism, you also give examples of movies that journalism students should watch. In my
time, it was *All the President’s Men* and *Wag the Dog*. Then we moved down to *Page 3*. Now, a movie that I recommend my students watch is *Madras Cafe*. So I wanted to ask: is this a true depiction of what was happening, and the role of the reporter there?

Madhuker Upadhyay

I was listening to the comments, particularly those of Shamindra and Augustine. There is a tendency for the government to want the media to act as non-state actors. The media follows it at times because news is a big money business and a big money industry. Not everyone can get enough money to set up a newspaper or a TV news channel. So it becomes much easier for governments to exercise control. Then sometimes some journalists take pride in being non-state actors, believing themselves to have the strength and power to control things, when they actually do not.

So my observation is this: Is the new media the answer, because that is what you should be focusing on? In this media, as Shamindra was saying, you can buy everything, including the journalists; paid news is very common in India. Internationally, it is perhaps not paid news—it is your jingoism, your nationalism, your ethnicity. But you are actually playing into somebody else’s hands. Is the new media the answer?

Audience: I want to make a small clarification. The gentleman over there was requested to go with the ICRC into natural disaster zones. He was there for a week and returned from Sweden. I am the Communications Manager for the International Federation of Red Cross Societies; and to complicate matters, ICRC works in war zones while we focus on natural disasters. I have done this for 40 years. Since we have many students here, I think it’s important to say this. Please contact me, I will be more than willing to help you.
AUDIENCE: Some of you have seen a period where the media has been given a lot of independence, too. You learnt to write in a profession where your salary did not matter so much. But now you have come to a world that is totally corporatised; you work in large business houses—how do you look at this change? Can anybody tell me whether it has changed your own abilities to deal with stories?

AUDIENCE: We have to be truthful when we are reporting: are we doing a story? There is always pressure; when we go to the industry, we are given stories which are filtered; this will also happen when the new media comes in. For example, in Bangladesh when a person was killed, there was a big rebellion in the Square, and in India, too, we use the new media to convey our messages.

So, my serious concern is: how does this honesty, as well as the pressure from media organisations, go together, and how do you become a good journalist altogether?

AUDIENCE: I wanted to inquire—since I am studying journalism—how important is education and training for journalists? We know for a fact that there are a lot of journalists who have not been trained in journalism; how important is such training, specifically for conflict-related instances?

AUDIENCE: I heard the chairperson talk about how the medium of television makes a spectacle of war and such other heinous crimes. I would like to ask how the print media acts on it, because of late, they too do not put things across subtly; they even use words that are loaded.

Sabina Kidwai

Somebody talked about the print media. The print media is also going through the same problem, because of the desire to grab
attention. There are many complications: you have a very highly corporatised industry now, and no longer have what used to be considered independent journalists, who would go out with the Editor’s blessings to get a story. Not you have corporations; a lot of TV channels are controlled by the industry and industrialists. So the whole profile of news and reporting has changed. The only difference is that print still has that scope—you can have a variety of articles on the same thing. You are curtailed a little less, but the photographic aspect of print has changed; the photographs actually take their cue from the TV industry. The photos are almost like a reproduction, especially in the case of the Mumbai attacks.

I feel that inter-connectivity is a big part of the new media; the traditional media and the new media are both very prominent, and the new media provides many answers—everything today is dependent on the perspective from which you look. If I want to look at a story on Kashmir, I can choose from many sites; what I absorb will also depend on my own prejudices and perspectives. The only advantage with the new media is that I will get 10 answers to the same question, and not just one. But I still have to choose from those 10. It is both positive and confusing, but it is what the world is moving towards.

Augustine Anthuvan

First, I hope my friends from India will take this in the right spirit. The only way the Indian media can change and move forward is if Indians shape it themselves. You deserve the media you get; I extend my small right to say this because India is my motherland—my mother was born in Karaikkal (Karaikkal, Pondicherry and Nagapattinam are three French colonies here). So it is pointless for anyone from the outside to tell you how your news channels can change; it has to be done, and the future is sitting here in this room! So I hope you’ve got the hint, young people! Work your way up and be that Editor!
I have not seen *Madras Café*, but when my friend says he has seen it four times, I will get the DVD myself! There are many other Hollywood films; we can take them offline and discuss them over lunch.

Yes, I use films in my journalism class.

The next point is about labels—why do we have to call people Muslim terrorists; and then why do we call the IRA Catholic terrorists? Why do we call the LTTE Hindu terrorists, and why do we call some of the chaps in Myanmar Buddhist terrorists? When can we move beyond the labels? That is a rule which is very important in a newsroom. So, we do not use the term ‘Muslim terrorists’. Even if it comes from news agencies, we do not use it. A lot depends on the internal guidelines in the newsroom.

Next, we come to training—we have compulsory media training in-house for all our journalists. Anyone who goes to any conflict area has to go through a special reporting course in conflict zones. Trust me, all our girls come out bruised because they have to learn to handle a kidnap situation, a teargas situation, before they are deployed to a conflict area. Of course, the other important element in our training is how to handle religion sensitively. That is a must in all situations.

I agree with Professor Sabina’s point about 24×7 media—it does create problems, but this is where we again have to have guidelines and good bosses in the newsroom to rectify these problems, and make sure that we continue to educate the public.

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*Shamindra Ferinando*

Actually, I see no difference between the electronic and the print media. They have the same agenda. All mainstream print media have their online editions. If you go back to 2000–03, you can see how the British and the American media created the situation in Iraq. Today, those who visit my country and ask us to explain our
position never explain why the British and the American media put out this story (about weapons of mass destruction) for about 18 months, just because the US and the UK needed to invade Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussain.

Second, the media is a powerful tool, controlled by the governments, regardless of what we might say. There is no independent media. The government tends to fund certain media organisations through INgos; you have governments funding the ICG, which in turn funds other groups in various other countries. So, it is a vicious circle; there is no free media, not in my country. It is controlled, either by the private sector, INgos, the embassies, or the government. That is the truth, which people do not want to admit.

Hashmatullah Radfar

There is independence for the media in Afghanistan. The kind of media that works through private capital or persons, or through financial aid from the international community and promoter countries is not very big in Afghanistan. It is not possible to consider them totally impartial. Their efforts towards the institutionalisation of democracy, observance of human rights, etc., have faced strong criticism from groups that try to prove that such efforts are part of Western trends. I want to ask a counter question: If you are not sure of independent media in India and other countries, how do you expect Afghanistan, where there are a lot of problems and continuing conflicts, to have one?

Audience: I would like to make three brief observations. One has to do with honesty and truthfulness. We keep telling our younger colleagues in the office that this is extremely important; actually, this is the baseline. We are not doing a favour to anyone, including our readers, by being honest. It is our duty; we need to be honest to ourselves primarily, and if we are not doing that, we can never be good journalists.
The second relates to education. I do not have any journalism background, in the sense that I did not go to journalism school. I had a passion for journalism, and I joined the profession. But I realise that a lot of young people today have become a little lazy, because it is so easy to get information on the Internet. When we test people at the time of joining, I am appalled at their lack of general knowledge! The other day, someone who wanted to become a journalist joined us; he wrote a paper and we asked him who the chief minister of Punjab was. He said, Sukhbir Singh Badal. I am sure he might want to become the chief minister one day, but he is not now. They do not even know the capitals of states; we do not want our readers to learn of this lack of wisdom and knowledge.

The last point has to do with the expressions we use. Some years ago, I read an expression that was really horrific. A news report from Meerut on communal conflicts (in Hindustan Times) spoke about a particular area by describing it as a ‘minority-infested area’. I know about mosquito-infested areas, but there is no such thing as a minority-infested area! That expression was obviously written by a journalist; it was passed and got into print.

Many years ago, when we were at the UNI and used to distribute the Associated Press copy, we had a lengthy discussion with a gentleman who headed the foreign operations of the AP. This was in the 1980s, when the Cold War was raging. We asked him, why they described Yassar Arafat as the ‘plo chieftain’, as opposed to plo chief or plo leader. He tried to answer, but his replies were not satisfactory. We also asked him why, in reports on the conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia, AP copies would invariably write, ‘Soviet-backed Ethiopian region’ (but never mention the us-backed Somalian regime).

Similarly, we asked him: Why is it that you speak about the North Korean dictator, but not about the Saudi dictator or the Iraqi dictator? Because they are your friends? But I must grant it to him—he was an honest man, he even cancelled his evening flight to Mumbai because he wanted to hear us out. Some minor
changes did take place, although they were not to our liking. But the basic point is, you have to be honest.

I am ashamed to admit that I have not seen *Madras Café*. The last movie I watched in a theatre was in 1986—*Dial M for Murder*. A lot of people in the office are asking me to see *Madras Café* and write about it, so I am going to do that.

Audiência: I want to add one point—the Tamil diaspora in the UK prevented UK cinema halls from screening the film.

Audiência: I will not talk about the film, but I want to tell people—in the past decade, we have had about 30–35 Indian feature films based on terrorist attacks, terrorist organisations, or people caught in such situations. It is clearly a hot topic for the Hindi feature film industry. One has to look at each of them separately, as you cannot say that one feature film is representative; it is one perspective on the issue, it is a story, and it will never be the final word. One should also not consider it the real truth. The truth also has at least 10 perspectives to it. So feature films need to be analysed, you need to look at them in terms of a situation and the position from which you are viewing it.

Audiência: I have not seen the film either, but Shekhar Gupta wrote a very nice piece in *The Indian Express*. Shekhar is also a veteran at covering the Sri Lanka conflict, and he has praised the movie, as far as accuracy and the incidents depicted are concerned.

Audiência: I was given both versions—positive and negative. It is precisely because it contains some amount of accuracy that the Tamil diaspora and pro-LTTE politicians in Tamil Nadu have ensured that the movie is not screened.

Our organisation was divided. The Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were two distinct organisations, and the media was also controlled by them. Some people were keen that the Ministry of Defence come to our office; some others
were keen on the Ministry of External Affairs. I am sorry that the story was not projected properly. The public, too, were not given a proper perspective.

Pamela Philipose (Chair)
We have come to the end of a very interesting session. This session has been full of life.

I want to leave you with four questions that came up from the last discussion. One: Is the media an independent entity? The students should ask themselves this question.

Two: Are your sources using you—which is the point Kamal Siddiqi made—or are you using the sources? This is an important question.

Two suggestions have come from the House; one that it is important to see the whole story, and not just cherry-pick what you want to see from a certain development or a document; it is important to read the whole thing and then come to a conclusion. And two, that to understand what is happening on the LOC between India and Pakistan, and the impact the conflict has had on both sides of the border would be a very useful exercise.
Bharat Bhushan (Chairperson)

Our first speaker will address issues relating to accuracy and verification in journalism. I think of it as a formula, which I call the IV fluid of a journalist—‘I’ stands for ‘investigation’ and ‘V’ for ‘verification’. These two pillars are very important for any journalist, the more so in relation to social media.

Accuracy and Verification in Journalism

Peter Cave

I was a journalist with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation for 42 years. I retired last year. During that time, I was based in various places around the world. I reported from 60-odd countries. The later part of my career was in the Middle East, reporting from Iraq and Libya, and from Palestine too. I was in Syria the last year before I retired.

What I am speaking about today is ‘social media’, and how we deal with social media. This is an interesting topic for someone who started his career in 1970, when we did not have the Internet; all that we basically had were phones, and the newest media was the Telex machine, I believe. The film was black and white; it was
sent to a laboratory where it was processed, and then it was edited using a pair of scissors and sticky tape.

So here I am, talking about social media. I would like to distinguish between social media—Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and various offshoots—and the new media, which I would regard as anything that uses the Internet to deliver what used to be newspapers or TV or radio, etc.

What I am talking about is the social medium. I would like to start by asking you a question and then answering it, if I can. What is the basic craft of the journalist? What do we do? I believe that if you strip it down to the bare essentials, a journalist gets paid to take a vast amount of information and winnow the wheat from the chaff—that is the very first part of the job. The second part is taking that wheat and using the professional skills that we all develop to mill the indigestible grain, mix it with a bit of water and yeast, and turn it into a life that is hopefully flavoursome and digestible, something that becomes a staple diet of those hungry for information. None of us is perfect; the skill of the journalist and journalistic organisations may vary; the bread may be leavened or unleavened; it may be light and vital, crisp and hearty, or brown and yeasty; but hopefully, would not be half-baked or doughy.

I have been asked here today to discuss the particular topic of accuracy and verification, the challenges of social media news in conflict situations. Social media, which I regard as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and all these offshoots, provide a vast amount of wheat and chaff.

I am not a great fan of Twitter; I used to have a Twitter account and my attack was picked up on Twitter, but I regard Twitter in particular as gossip. I think that anybody who has access to the Internet can take a juicy piece of information, and in their attempt to be first with the information, add their own bit and then put it out there.

Like gossip, Twitter can be completely accurate; it can be directly from the source; but it might also be malicious gossip. It
can be totally true or it can be totally false. Information that comes from a source like Twitter has to be treated like any other form of information, and needs to be dealt with as such. You will have to use your professional skills as a journalist to get rid of unwanted things.

Having probably been a bit sceptical, I tended to reject social media at first; but then, while covering the Bangkok riots a few years ago, I noticed that the social media acted not as a primary source of information, but in the chaos that was Bangkok in those few days, it provided a tip off—it allowed people to get a rough idea of what was going on and where it was going on, and then I could go there and do my reporting. I took a bit more interest and also visited CNN a couple of years ago and had a look at the very effective systems they use for aggregating Twitter; they have a sophisticated software that looks at all the tweets going around and watches to see where things are moving. Again, it is a very useful source of information, a starting point at least for doing a professional job.

Social media provides information that sometimes comes directly from the source. Sometimes, what you get on the social media is someone who is on the spot, who is seeing what is going on and reporting it. That is not always the case, though; sometimes, someone in a completely different country pretends to be elsewhere and tries to aggrandise himself. This is very dangerous; he may name a newspaper as witness, and that perhaps has to be treated with scepticism.

Last week, if you had searched for Syria on YouTube, you would have got several million hits; if you changed that search to Syria war crimes, you would be surprised to have 800,000 hits—that is, there are 800,000 videos somehow related to Syria and war crimes. Both sides of the conflict are claiming thousands of videos as evidence of war crimes. There is little doubt that social media has become an ideological battleground, one where propaganda can be inserted anonymously by anyone; some of the misinformation can be quite easily disproven and some cannot; some things laughably false and
some are not. There is exciting footage, live evidence of summary executions, torture, poisoning, gas attacks by both their forces and rebel groups. Some of the videos that I looked through the other day are from Iraq; some are from Palestine; some are from Libya; some from conflicts in Africa; some are even from fictional cinema. They are all up there, purporting to be direct evidence of atrocities.

One particularly gruesome video that purportedly shows their forces beheading a prisoner with a chain has been on the Internet for years; it is actually from Mexico and is the handiwork of a local Mexican drug lord. There are videos available for everything on the social media, and you could very well be misled or mislead.

Another video originated on State TV in Syria and found its way on to YouTube. It shows a man said to be an Algerian in his hotel room in Homs. He films the TV, which is screening footage from Al Jazeera, showing the devastated city of Homs and smoking rooms; he then turns his camera towards the window and says that this is all rubbish and is being put out to damage the government. Fortunately, anyone with any knowledge of the capital Damascus can notice the pretty landmarks. The man was standing in Damascus and proving that what was being shown on TV was false.

As I said, social media can be very fast. It could provide fast-breaking news from an area that it is not possible to get to immediately—because the government would not let you in and because of the danger of covering it—so there is a tendency to take that news at face value in order to be first with the sensational information.

These pitfalls were obvious after the Boston marathon bombings, where major US networks were misled by information on Twitter, some of them from what should have been official sources. Misinformation was grabbed and not put through normal processes of checking and verification because of the competition to start early.

The anonymity of the social media is a problem; it is very easy for anyone to open a social media account and portray her/himself as someone else, despite efforts by Twitter to officially verify
Twitter sources. Even official Twitter sources have been hacked and taken over, and misinformation put out.

Secrecy can be very important for people tweeting from conflict zones; their very lives may be in danger. So they have to remain anonymous. But as I said, anonymity remains a danger for us.

One of the ways to penetrate that is to use social media as a way of making contact with direct sources. It is something on which I have worked—going through Twitter or YouTube, or various other social media and making contact with direct sources, so that you could contact the source in question and attempt to verify and confirm the information.

What I am saying, is that there is something special about new media. It is a vast source of information that needs to be treated like any other source of information; we need to use our professional skills that we learn as journalists to be sceptical, to try to verify, and at the very least, winnow the chaff.

Chair: Mr Peter Cave has also won awards in his career, which he did not mention. As a journalist, he holds a special position; he has won a special Walkley award for outstanding contribution in Australian journalism.

Peter, we have recently seen that even the negotiations between the government and the militants in Syria are on Twitter—the social media has literally taken over. Look at the younger generation, the future journalists sitting before us; they cannot live without these new news agencies.

I am sure there will be many questions. But let us keep all of them for the second round.

Now, we move to the second speaker. Mohammad Sharif is from Afghanistan and he will share his personal experiences of living in a theatre of conflict. He will be speaking on ‘Media responsibility and sensitivity in crisis situations’. Mr Sharif began his career with the Movie Media Group as a reporter. He is one of
the emerging editors of Afghanistan and is well-respected there. He has travelled and amassed a lot of experience, including, I am sure, with some sort of self-censorship. He has reported on the US elections and other international events and conferences.

Media Responsibility and Sensitivity in Crisis Situations

Mohammad Sharif Hassanyar

I would like to begin with some information about the media and the army in Afghanistan in the last four decades.

The 1960s and 1970s were the decades of democracy in Afghanistan, during the reign of King Zahir Shah. At that time, for the first time, the independent media was established in Afghanistan and the media law passed by Parliament. Media law became a part of the supportive constitutional law in Afghanistan.

After the removal of Zahir Shah, the first President of Afghanistan, Daoud Khan, established television in Afghanistan. At that time, this was available only in Kabul.

I have a small bit of information—when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, there was no private media, or any independent media. Any person asking the government for information would be arrested and jailed. After the communist regime was defeated by the Mujahedin, the civil war started in Afghanistan, just when the television network was set up in Kabul. And after the defeat of the Mujahedin, intolerance prevailed all over the country, and there fell a period of silence in Afghanistan. At that time, darkness prevailed everywhere; no one was allowed to watch TV or listen to music. Girls and women could not go out; listening to the radio was a crime. Any infringement was punished by the Taliban.

Afghanistan had only one radio at that time, called Radio Sharia. All it broadcast was the propaganda of the Taliban; their sacrifices and activities were present in songs without music.
After the fall of the Taliban in 2000, there was again freedom of expression in Afghanistan; several hundred radio and TV channels, newspapers and magazines were established. The media law was passed again by the new Parliament of Afghanistan, which now included freedom of expression. The role of the media in reflecting the development and living standards in our country was considered very constructive and positive. Nearly 500 media outlets—TV, radio stations, newspapers, magazines, etc.—are active now in Afghanistan. A huge number of youngsters and political parties are using Twitter, Facebook, and other social media. But a lot of challenges remain.

The first is that the media in Afghanistan are very young; but they have experience with the new media and the new system in Afghanistan. But as my topic is about the sensitivity and responsibility of the media, I have to say that unfortunately, war is going on in Afghanistan; journalists are unable to go and report in some parts of the country. As my colleagues mentioned, several journalists reporting from the war zone were killed, perhaps by the Taliban, perhaps the NATO forces. I can name some of them here.

For example, Samad Rohani was killed by smugglers. Sultan Munadi was killed in a NATO operation. He was kidnapped by the Taliban along with a British journalist. The NATO troops launched an operation; unfortunately, Sultan Munadi was killed while the British journalist was released. Ajmal Naqshbandi was arrested by the Taliban with an Italian journalist; the latter was released after a deal was struck, with the Afghan government agreeing to release the Taliban commander if the Taliban released the Italian journalist. Unfortunately, though, Ajmal Naqshbandi was beheaded by the Taliban at that time.

The media has played a great role in Afghanistan during the past years: they have been very good in the health sector, in cultural affairs, and in the economic sector as well. But a problem remains in the economic sector—we have four types of media in Afghanistan. One belongs to the government and broadcasts
government propaganda. The second has been established by some businessmen and the private sector. The third belongs to the political parties and jihadi leaders. The fourth is the ethnic and ideological media, which is supported by some foreign countries, especially our neighbouring country.

So in this case, the Afghan private media, or the free and independent media, has done a good job in Afghanistan during the past few years. They know how to persuade the people, how to keep the people abreast of what is going on in Afghanistan.

For example, they played a good role in cultural relations. I was a witness when the Taliban was defeated and the new government established in Afghanistan, when TV and the radio started to work again. We had no Afghan songs on our television and radios; they used to broadcast Indian and some other foreign songs. But by creating good programmes, Afghanistan is now persuading the young generation to sing songs. Now, 80–90 per cent of the songs on Afghan TV are Afghan songs. Somehow, the media are doing good programmes on culture, and bringing back the ancient place of Afghanistan.

In the health sector, unfortunately, Afghanistan has a problem. Our country is at war, and I am sure all of you know that there are lots of problems in the health sector. But the Afghan media—TV, radio stations, newspapers, etc.—have a responsibility and they have sensitivities. They did some good reports on how to make the health sector better. For example, two years ago I sent one of my reporters to Bamiyan Province, at the centre of Afghanistan. This province has a lot of mountains. Mountains divide two districts, and the people have no access because there are no roads to that place. People there use animals to travel. Once, they came with a woman who was sick. It took four hours to reach the centre of Bamiyan Province from that district, with the help of animals. As the path was not good, after two hours, the woman unfortunately died. Once the reporter returned to Kabul, he made a report. The Ministry of Health paid attention, and now focuses attention on
anyone coming from that district. It means that they care about
the media and the media’s independence in Afghanistan.

But we still have too many economic problems. As you know,
more than 40 countries have a presence in Afghanistan. Our
economy is based on the help they give to the people and to the
government. But as you might know from the media, we have
a corrupt government in Afghanistan. Corruption is a big issue.
Why does the Afghan media not pay attention to this? It is because
some private media are doing the funding, or some programmes
are being sponsored by big telecom companies? That is why, for
example, it was the foreign media who first criticised the
Kabul Bank. Because of their sponsors, the Afghan media has
chosen to stay silent.

The telecom companies also pay the Taliban because in the
Taliban-controlled areas, the Taliban will not allow them in
and will blow up their antennas unless they pay. So they pay,
and unfortunately, since the telecom companies sponsor some
programmes in Afghanistan, the media keeps quiet. The Afghan
government provides no subsidies to the private media, that is, the
non-government media.

Given this, reporting is very difficult for journalists in
Afghanistan, especially in the south of Afghanistan, where the
Taliban is in control. Afghan journalists are facing three types
of threats: the Taliban threat; the world threat, which has power
in this region; and the government threat. Despite this, Afghan
journalists respect the freedom of speech as a goal and are
continuing their work.

chair: Thank you, Hassanyar, for your presentation. Afghanistan is
particularly close to my heart. One of my friends was kidnapped by
the Taliban—Hariyanzai, who was later released, after negotiations
were held in Qatar. Another friend, who edits Afghanistan Today, is
in exile in Munich—Hussain Yaza. So I know how difficult it is to
work in Afghanistan. As you said, the threat is not only from the Taliban, but also from the government and intelligence agencies, because otherwise Hussain Yaza would not have left home and hearth and settled outside in Munich.

May I now invite Malinda Seneviratne, Editor-in-Chief of The Nation, one of the most prominent newspapers in Sri Lanka. He is a writer, poet and journalist, and is known for his strong political views. His formal training was in Sociology; he completed his Bachelor’s Degree from Harvard University, and did a Ph.D. from Cornell before deciding that he had had enough of schooling. He then became a journalist.

Media’s Role in Bringing Forth Post-conflict Issues

Malinda Seneviratne

In the inaugural session, Mr Adam Roberts said that the media have not been playing a role in post-conflict situations, something which Pamela picked up during the last session. So this bring us back to the media’s role.

Sri Lanka had an armed insurrection that ended a few years ago. Here, we can talk about post-conflict in particular contexts like resettlement, and rehabilitation of combatants and reintegrating them into society; there are about 14,000 people associated with the LTTE, fighters, who were rehabilitated, given training so they could be engaged in some meaningful occupation, and reintegrated in society. And then there is also reconstruction.

The media can and must report and speak about that. Professor Siddiqui and Professor Sajid both talked about the importance of reporting and analysis. Both occur in relation to these immediate and tangible post-conflict issues like reconstruction and resettlement. There is also the creation of space for democratisation and demilitarisation, which needs to be talked about. The media does a lot of political reporting and analysis of various issues associated with these.
We return to the basics of the media, which is what the students probably learn about—Peter was talking about verification, information, reliability of sources, integrity, honesty, balance, etc. What does not happen enough is probably the contextualisation of these things. Adam Roberts, in his larger intervention in the media, probably contextualises things better; here, he was very brief. But it will be a good exercise to talk about a few things that he imagined—one was about going to the northern province and asking people what it is like in a post-conflict situation and hearing that the conflict is not yet over; because there is still military presence in parts of the north and the east.

Speaking to other people gives us the other side of the story, where the Tamil nationalists, in their campaigns, are glorifying a terrorist organisation. Some people call them liberators; usually, in other countries, people bearing arms are called rebels; in our own country, we call them terrorists.

However, despite the fact that the pro-LTTE elements of the expatriate Sri Lankan Tamil community raise a big hue and cry, you cannot, after fighting for 30 years, expect a State—which is responsible for the security of all citizens in all parts of the country (and the war was not limited to the north and the east)—to be cautious about withdrawing. There has been demilitarisation in a sense, but perhaps not to the satisfaction of all; it depends on where you are coming from and what your political agenda and preferences are. So that contextualisation has to happen.

He also spoke about Charles Taylor. What did he do? He armed some terrorists in a neighbouring country. People are selective about saying something like that. We talked about a country arming some group in a neighbouring country—India and Sri Lanka, for instance. How can you talk about one and not the other? How can those who accuse Sri Lanka of various things not stand up to accusations aimed at them? If we are to be honest in a media intervention, we have to talk about the larger picture. We cannot talk about geo-politics, for example, in Sri Lanka. We
can speak, if we choose to, about incidents. But if we pick up on incidents, are we doing our best as journalists or as media people? I am not sure.

To provide the story outline, we go to Facebook or Twitter. As Peter said, you have to treat them as raw sources. Augustine mentioned this earlier. You do not go to Wikipedia—that is being lazy and irresponsible. You have to get a deeper sense of what you are dealing with, because the damage you can do with a frivolous statement is immense. Suppose a journalist writing about this conference took Adam’s examples and ran with them, what is the message that would be given? Things are sent through ideological structures, where certain political preferences prevail, and these preferences are privileged. In such cases, we do not get anything close to the truth. If that is something we subscribe to, then we are propagandists of one kind or another.

There were a lot of discussions about independence; we are talking about whether we are pawns. As my friend Shamindra said, there is no absolute independence; we all work for owners. The owners have their friends. They make us operate within certain boundaries. We choose to stand in the middle and say that there is a frame; if it is a government creating boundaries, we say there is no media freedom; or we can try to push the frame and be creative about it. So, it is a question of whose pawns we are. Are we aware that we are pawns? Are we willing to state that we are? Are we willing to disclose our biases, because we are all human beings and we all have our preferences?

I do not know the extent to which we are honest. Everyone talks about honesty; our students are taught to be honest. But if we are honest, we have to talk about how selective we are, why we are selective, why we privilege something and not something else. I work for a newspaper that is not owned by the government. But it is owned by very rich businessmen, who are very close to the regime. I am sure that if the government changes tomorrow, they will be very close to the new regime as well. How do I criticise the
government within this? There was a time when I was a freelance journalist and wrote for six different newspapers; what I could not write in one, I could write in another. And if I could not write in any of them, I would post it on my blog. But as an editor of a newspaper, I do not have that privilege.

I will give two examples: I came across a post on Facebook by a Nigerian writer who had written about Nigeria, but it was equally about Sri Lanka. We are so globalised that we can write about Kashmir, and it will be applicable in another part of the world. So I asked him if I could publish this in the paper. He agreed. I carry his writings almost every week, about both Nigeria and Sri Lanka. This is one way out—you have to be creative. You cannot criticise the government beyond a certain point because you will then lose your job, and the space to do whatever you can do.

I also use a lot of history; history is not just of the past, it is also the present. What has happened in some other part of the world also happens in Sri Lanka.

You might have heard of the ‘16 nightmares’. A person called King Kosala, who lived during the time of the Buddha, had 16 nightmares. He asked the Buddha to interpret them. Buddha does so one by one. If you read it all, you will see it is a treatise on good governance. If you violate the principles of good governance, something happens. The Buddha asks the King not to worry, this is not about him; this is something that will happen in some other place and in some other time.

I am talking about Sri Lanka and its problems. The newspaper owners are very close to those who rule my country, but we get around it.

I would like to add one more thing about the reliability of sources, verification, honesty, balance, and also humility. The sum total of human knowledge is like a grain compared to the universe of ignorance. If we keep that in mind, we can always correct ourselves. If we take really hard positions based on this tiny bit that we know, we cannot walk out to where we can come. Sometimes, we have to step back.
This is something that is lacking. Sometimes, if you are humble enough to admit that your position is wrong, it can empower you.

CHAIR: Thank you. You told us about post-conflict reportage, and what needs to be done. I do not follow the Sri Lankan media very closely—except what some friends from Sri Lanka send me—but I hope the discussion will tell us how the Sri Lankan media reports on what is happening to the 13th Amendment. After the victory against the LTTE, the Supreme Court has given a judgment on land rights, which now have to be interpreted in a different way. This refers to land that the Centre gives the Provinces, which they can control. How the 13th Amendment has been diluted consciously by the judiciary and by the State, what has happened to the LLRC (Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission—a Sri Lankan government Commission); why are its recommendations not being implemented fully?

Equally, what about the rights of the Sri Lankan Tamils, as per the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact? How is it that parties wanting to form a government can sign a pact with the Tamils, assuring them of political rights, and once they come to power, go back on it? We are witnessing the same thing now vis-à-vis devolution. I hope some of these issues will come up and be addressed. We will take them up in the discussion; other people may have different issues to bring up.

Now I will invite Mr Prashant Aryal. He is Editor-in-Chief of Nepal Magazine, one of the most influential Nepali magazines. He comes from a place where conflict has seemingly ended, but not quite. Let us hear what he has to say.

**Does the Media Have Enough Training to Report on Man-made of Natural Disasters?**

*Prashant Aryal*

As you know, Nepal has been heading towards elections after a decade-long Maoist insurgency. The Constituent Assembly could
not create a constitution; we had to move towards another election. I have prepared a very brief note on this.

Disaster issues—regardless of whether the disaster is natural or man-made—always make headlines since they are directly or indirectly connected to the lives of a large number of people. Disasters cause havoc, and can make even greater news if not acted upon in time. Since it is such a sensitive issue, journalists definitely play a very important role in dealing with it. What compounds matters in a country like Nepal is the fact that we lack adequate technical infrastructure; the mindset of people is poor; the geology is young and fragile; there are variable climate conditions, unplanned settlements, an increasing population, weak economic conditions, and low literacy rates. Disasters always turn out to be more tragic than they should have been.

The last man-made disaster in Nepal was the 10-year Maoist conflict, where 16,000 fresh lives were lost. The conflict ended in 2006 and the rebel party, the United Communist Party of Nepal Maoists, came into mainstream politics. It won the largest number of seats in the last Constituent Assembly, and remains one of the most influential parties. Yet imbalances exist in Nepal; there are dozens of armed groups still active in parts of the country, and many of them were once a part of the Maoist movement. Official data states that eight journalists were killed after the peace process started, and an atmosphere of terror still prevails in Nepal. Altogether, 35 journalists have been killed in Nepal since the Maoists movement started in 1996.

Now, with an eye on the upcoming elections scheduled (2013), the Maoists, the largest separatist group from the former rebel party, has emerged as the biggest threat. They are in a mood of ‘active’ protest. In opposition, the Chief Justice-led government has decided to use the Nepal army for security purposes during the elections. These serious problems easily signify that the upcoming elections could be under the shadow of violence. Given this context, you can imagine the challenges facing Nepali journalists.
Coming to natural disasters, it has been found that the issues indicating disasters have been far less reported than the post-disaster scenario. Much of the media has been without any particular disaster experts or reporters, and in many instances, these issues are reported by an environmental reporter. In a mountainous and not well-developed country like Nepal, many well-trained and educated reporters are not prepared to leave the capital and visit the regional headquarters in order to obtain a real and minute picture of disasters. They do not have enough contextual information or sources, or know the gravity of the disaster to analyse it.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for that pithy presentation, although I wish you had talked some more about how the Maoist insurgency was brought in, or how the Maoists have entered multi-party democracy and transformed themselves from gun-toting insurgents to people who actually behave very well in the Constituent Assembly and help formulate the Nepal Constitution. About 70–75 per cent of the Constitution is already ready; there are only a few crucial issues left.

I wish you had dwelt more on natural disasters, too; but I hope you will say more during the discussion because both India and Nepal—the whole of our Eastern Himalayas—share the same geology, the same geography, the same problems.

Before we begin the discussion, I shall speak for a few minutes on how journalists in India report on conflicts.

I will now invite my old friend Rahimullah Khan Yusufzai, who is without doubt one of the bravest journalists in the subcontinent. He never left Peshawar in the worst of times and despite threats to his life, continued to be a journalist there; he has been a beacon of hope for most of us. He is currently Executive Editor of the Jang Group newspaper, *The News* at Peshawar. He also writes for their magazine, *Newsline*. He is noted for his last interview with Osama bin Laden. He has been awarded great honours by the
Pakistan government—the Tumgha-i-Imtiaz and Sitara-i-Imtiaz. He received the Sitara-i-Imtiaz for his achievements in the field of journalism twice—in 2009 and 2010. He is, as I said, a star amongst journalists.

Should Media Report Acts of Terrorism? If Not, Why Not?

*Rahimullah Khan Yusufzai*

My brief answer to the above question to begin with, will be yes, the media should report acts of terrorism, but it should do so responsibly and with restraint. I will start by presenting examples of my country’s most dangerous and powerful militant organisation, the TTP—Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. Every day, without fail, its spokesman, Shahidullah Shahid, calls a number of journalists from North Waziristan.

We know he is from North Waziristan because we get his phone calls and the code number is 0928, the code for the capital of North Waziristan, Miranshah. But we cannot mention that he is in North Waziristan (he has asked us not to disclose his location), and so out of fear, we always state that he had called from an unknown location. But everybody—even the Pakistan government—knows this; yet somehow he is able to evade arrest.

He calls every day with a statement or news regarding their attacks. It then becomes a major news event, and is endlessly discussed on TV channels and in newspaper columns. The terrorist gets publicity and the reporter is happy to get this news, based on a one-sided statement. Shahidullah Shahid and the previous TTP spokesman, Ehsanullah Ehsan Moulvi Omar Muslim Khan, are now household names in Pakistan, thanks to such publicity.

However, we cannot say for certain that it is Shahidullah Shahid who called us, as several persons have been using this name.

There is yet another context to this: at least the faces of the TTP spokesmen are familiar because they have been interviewed on TV.
But what about Afghanistan? The Afghan Taliban’s spokesmen, Zabiullah Mujahid and Qari Yusuf Ahmadi, are faceless. They call us, they call everybody; but we have never seen their faces because they have never appeared on TV. So while they are well-known and have their statements published, no journalist has ever met them or seen them.

What I want to say is that the initiative lies mostly with the terrorists and the militants, from the planning stage to the execution. As they are on the offensive, the government often reacts to the attacks. After every terrorist attack, the media and others wait for someone to claim responsibility. We want to be the first to report it. Then there is a long wait for the video footage of the attack. Everybody is so keen and desperate to get that footage, especially the TV channels.

Every act benefits the terrorists—the mayhem at the site of the blast, the mismanagement, the scenes at the hospitals, etc. Recently, there was an attack on a church in Peshawar, my city, in which 85 people were killed—84 were church-goers, one was a policeman. So there were 84 Christians killed and one Muslim. The Christians turned violent after the attack; they attacked the main hospital in Peshawar, the Lady Reading Hospital—this was the first time that the hospital was attacked by attendants and protesters. So chaos reigned everywhere and the government was criticised for the slow response and the security lapses; the police then came under criticism; the doctors, hospital administration, everybody was under some strain—there was chaos, anger and protest. This is what the terrorist want and they were able to achieve it for the most part; it happens all the time.

I read somewhere that the media is a battlefield of terrorism. Then we have a debate over the definition of terrorism; as we often hear, one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter. This confusion also benefits terrorists. It is clear that terrorists need publicity for their cause and they need it free, because they otherwise might not be able to afford it. The media, in this age of 24-hour TV
news, thriving social media and cut-throat competition, is always ready to oblige. Terrorism mostly works because the governments and citizens give in, and often the media, too, gives in.

There is a strong argument that journalists have an obligation towards the reader, and therefore we must report all acts of terrorism because this is important news and impacts the lives of people. There is no way that news on terrorists can be blacked out. But as I have said earlier, we have to report it responsibly, with restraint, and with the belief that these acts are inhuman and evil.

As Margaret Thatcher once famously said, publicity is the oxygen of terrorists. Efforts must be made to deny them undue publicity. Still, the media has to do its job independent of the government, and certainly not under the threat of terrorists.

The next challenge is to exercise some kind of self-censorship, but without allowing the government to impose too many restrictions and take away press freedom and other civil liberties. There is an ongoing debate about whether it is possible to deal with the new trends in terrorism within the existing legal framework.

To counter this argument, someone said that the best propaganda is truth. How far this works can be debated. It reminds me also of our country’s former President, Asif Ali Zardari’s, famous quote—that democracy is the best revenge. So we can say that truth is the best propaganda.

Apart from the increasing brutality of the terrorist attacks, journalists are also under constant threat. In my own country, around 90 journalists have been killed in the past few decades because of their work. They have mostly been killed in conflict areas like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, previously called the North West Frontier Province (to which I belong), and fata, the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. Lately, in Baluchistan, a low-level Baluch insurgency has been going on. So the greatest number of fatalities has actually been in Baluchistan.

The sad part of the story is that of the 90 people who have been killed, only two cases have been independently investigated. One is
that of a journalist from the tribal areas of North Waziristan called Hayatullah; he was kidnapped and killed in 2005. The second case became very well-known—Saleem Shahzad, who was kidnapped from Islamabad and killed last year.

These two investigations were carried out by the judiciary; they were the only cases to be investigated, despite demands by the journalist unions. One of the reports (of Saleem Shahzad’s killing) was made public, but it did not say anything, nor did it pin the blame on anybody. So whoever killed him was not exposed. In Hayatullah’s case, the report was not made public, despite demands. We thought that terrorists kill with impunity; there is no investigation, and that is why there are more killings and deaths. One of the issues that I want to highlight is the code of conduct. There are many public complaints, especially in Pakistan, about tv journalism—they were showing terrorist attacks live, and they were showing blood and bodies. After that, tv Channel Executives held a meeting and came up with a code of conduct. It was not very comprehensive and has not been fully implemented. But I would say that it is a good start—at least they have understood the extent of the problem.

They can build on that code of conduct, if it is implemented. I would also like to say that unlike in many other countries, tv journalism in Pakistan is new. It is going through a learning process, and I think will become mature. When people raise the issue of the responsibility of tv journalism, I reply, ‘Do you have any complaint about the print media from Pakistan?’ They say, ‘No, it is largely doing okay.’ So, I tell them that print journalism has matured; it has been around for 66 years. But tv journalism is new; it is growing, it is learning, and it will also become mature in due course. But as you all know, there are problems with being too dependent, irresponsible; this culture of ‘breaking news’ is apparent in India and in South Asia as well. There are complaints against such kinds of news.

Lastly, I keep asking myself, even now, whether I should have done those two interviews with Osama bin Laden. They took place
in 1998 in Afghanistan. My answer is yes, if I have a chance, I will do them again. Although you can be accused of providing a platform to a terrorist, the problem is that there is so much demand for such interviews. The biggest demand was from American TV channels. Osama bin Laden attacked America, but the American TV network wanted this interview at any cost. CNN was the first TV network to do an interview with Osama bin Laden, in 1996; although Robert Fisk of The Independent also did one interview, he did so for the print media.

The question of demand is always present; he was a newsmaker, and he is dead now. So we wanted to know what he was up to, and what he has to say. I think that is why we cannot afford to miss these stories or interviews.

Besides bin Laden, I also interviewed Dr Amana Zafari, who was with Osama bin Laden at the time. I think the first and last interview with Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, was also done by me. So I appear to be doing it again and again.

CHAIR: Thank you for telling us the problems that exist in reporting the acts of terrorism.

You may remember—I met you in Peshawar; I came as part of the Editors’ Mission, to look at how tribal terrorists were being harassed. The kind of relationship that journalists are forced to develop with terrorists as well as dacoits is amazing—the most famous dacoit in those days, who used to kidnap journalists, was a man called Mangal Bhai. If he was unhappy with anything you wrote, he just kidnapped and tortured you till you gave him an undertaking to not write about him. Only then might you be released. However, such kidnapping and conditioning of journalists is done not only by terrorists and dacoits, but also by the security agencies. Among those reporting on these kidnappings were people who had actually been kidnapped themselves by security agencies, who can kill you or release you, but about whom you will never write again.
These are the difficult circumstances under which extremely brave Pakistani journalists have been working, especially in the North West Frontier Province. At least people like Rahimullah are known figures; everybody recognises them, and God forbid, nothing will happen to him. But there are tribal journalists who are stringers; they die all the time, get kidnapped and tortured all the time, but there is nobody to look after them because they are not under regular employment. They work on a freelance basis.

With regard to self-regulation, there is a big debate going on in India as well. For example, after 26/11, just as in Pakistan, you had certain guidelines for TV channels—should we be reporting these actions live? Will they be helping terrorists? What is the impact of specialised reporting? Take the case of communal violence in India. Guidelines were issued by the Press Council of India, and were followed. You do not say so many Muslims or Hindus died; you do not even identify temples—you call them ‘places of worship and places of prayer’, and people know what you mean. That helps. So self-regulation is important, and should not be seen as something that curtails journalistic freedom. It should not be regulation imposed from above.

Now we come to the last speaker from Bangladesh—Naem Nizam, Editor of Bangladesh Pratidin.

He has over two decades of experience in print and broadcast media, and is regarded as an influential thought leader in Bangladesh civil society.

Journalism and Public Opinion: Do They Integrate?

Naem Nizam

Journalism and public opinion are two separate things, but are complementary to each other in the practical field; journalism cannot achieve its goal by ignoring public opinion, and public opinion will find it difficult to gain momentum without the support
of the media. Both succeed through coordination and cooperation. More importantly, journalism—both print and electronic media—serves as a mirror to public opinion and flourishes with its blessing. In fact, journalism derives vital inspiration from the people. It deals with the perceptions, hopes, aspirations, and interests of people, and in turn public opinion is often influenced by journalism. In fact, journalism and public opinion are largely interrelated, but on certain issues may—and do—confront each other as well.

We have witnessed this in our own country and in our own time. Journalism—both electronic and print—in our country is largely free, and so is the expression of public opinion. Perhaps it is because of this that on certain occasions in the recent past, we have observed both complementary and conflicting instances. For example, when public opinion in both electronic and print media was formally against the rise of religious fanaticism, a small section of the media supported it for political gains. At the same time, the media influenced and guided public opinion in the right direction when it was confused and misled by the vested political circle on the crucial issue of war criminals’ trials.

But above all that, coordination and integration of public opinion and journalism have accomplished the tremendous task of upholding the spirit of our war of liberation, democracy, and non-communal spread in politics, as well as combating terrorism, religious fanaticism and militancy. It is by virtue of choosing between public opinion and the outlook of the media that Bangladesh is a land of communal harmony and peace.

Journalism, in one sense, is more powerful now than nuclear power as it not only projects public opinion, but also moulds, influences and dominates it. Indeed, journalism contributes substantially to the shaping of politics and the economy, as well as the future of the people of the country. This is why it is important to coordinate between journalism and public opinion.
chair: Is journalism—or should journalism be—a reflection of public opinion? Personally, I am not too sure. If it is so, then we should also ask: When you have a corporatisation of the media, market segmentation, and readership profiling, which public are we really talking about? There is no homogenous public as far as I can see. You talked about the movement for secular politics—the Shahbag Movement and war criminals’ trials, etc.

Your media did play a very good role, but there were two publics—one for secularism, and the other, which has been agitating in the streets against the supporters of Jamaat and BNP.

The other thing I want you to really think about—perhaps you can talk about it in the discussion—is that when journalism and public opinion are complementary, is it necessarily good, or does journalism also have a vanguard, being ahead of public opinion? For example, in India, we have a political phenomenon called Narendra Modi, who I personally believe is a fascist leader. Now, public opinion is in his favour; so should journalists reflect that, or should they be critical of a public figure and actually show what this man is about or what this politics is all about? I hope you will answer some of these questions in the discussion.

I wanted to say a few things about the Indian media. When we talk about conflict reporting, I always ask myself: Can embedded journalists do fair reporting? The corollary to this question is, are you embedded only physically (as, for instance, in the Iraq war) or embedded ideologically, in the dominant ideology of the State? You are then expected to do be fair in your reporting, but can you do that?

In my experience—and I have been in journalism for more than 25 years—journalists in India are ideologically embedded in a status framework. You can take extreme examples—J&K and India’s Northeast. How accurate is our reporting from these conflict zones? Within which framework do we judge the accuracy of the reporting from J&K or the Northeast? Are these conflicts reported from the perspective of the people who live there, or are they
reported from the perspective of the State, from the perspective of citizen's rights; I do not mean only civil liberties like the freedom of speech, but political rights, which may or may not fall within the Constitution of India as it exists today, because as journalists, we are not really a State upholding a great Constitution (it is a great Constitution, by the way).

But we also have a State which functions according to that Constitution, and resorts to violence to ensure its existence. As journalists, we adopt the entire value structure of the State and talk about all sorts of insurgencies—the Naga insurgency in the Northeast, for example. You will find innumerable reports and opinions in newspapers saying that the solutions should remain within the four walls of the Indian Constitution, without thinking that the Constitution of India is not a brick and mortar structure. It is a flexible structure; it is a law given by human beings who are also Indian citizens, and we can change it, if it means getting the Nagas within India.

Similar is the case with J&K, although Kashmir has a different Constitution. So if the Nagas want a separate Constitution, why can they not have it? But there are ways of integrating it, and seeing how the Naga Constitution can become a chapter in the Indian Constitution; it can become a Schedule in the Indian Constitution; it can become a new Article. Kashmir’s Constitution is there; Article 370 recognises it.

So as journalists, when reporting on conflicts, we must stop mouthing inanities that mean nothing; to my mind, the statement that all conflicts must be resolved within the Constitution of India is a meaningless assertion. It is shocking to see how the media reports from key conflict zones. In Kashmir and the Northeast, it is complete status reporting, and it ignores other conflict zones.

How many reporters go to Maoist-insurgency affected districts and report on what is going on there? Nobody goes there; that conflict exists, but there is no conflict reporting. So the media
in India are really in danger of becoming an extended arm of the Indian State, because they internalise the dominant value structure of the State. What has also happened ever since India became a nuclear power and we became the engine of growth for the world economy (because the engine of growth has moved to the East—China and India), and since India’s bid for the UN Security Council, we, the journalists, have internalised what I call ‘the big power discourse’, that is, India is a big power, and must be respected at the high tables of the world.

This discourse, and the nationalism that goes with it, affects our reporting on conflicts. It affects our reporting when the Chinese make so-called incursions against the Line of Actual Control, or when something happens on the Loc in Kashmir. We immediately have TV news anchors who ask everybody on behalf of the nation: Why are we not teaching China a lesson, why are we not telling the Pakistanis to get off?

These responses come because you have internalised the discourse. You think that you are a great power and everybody must bow before you. By the way, such anchors are great inspirations for journalism schools.

A friend of mine from Pakistan, Shariar Khan, once told me that anybody who ever claims to be speaking on behalf of the people should be stopped immediately and asked: How do you know? How do the people who sit in TV studios for 12–14 hours know what the people think about? Which people? And why are their biases imposed on us? So journalism becomes more than journalism; it becomes a vigilante politics of sorts, where you are trying to manoeuvre everybody in a particular direction.

You may look at the Home Ministry correspondent, at people who report on internal security—the Home Ministry is responsible for internal security—or the Diplomatic Correspondents (with due apologies to Mr Narayan Swamy). They virtually become stenographers of the State! You get nothing critical on India’s foreign policy; you get nothing critical on internal security matters.
So reporting on conflicts has actually become a force multiplier for the Indian State.

Take the case of resource conflicts. When land and mineral resources are taken away from people and given to corporates, a conflict ensues. But you will find that the media always reports it as the growth-need of India. Coal mines have to be handed over free to electricity companies because they will then generate more electricity; more electricity will lead to greater industrialisation; greater industrialisation will lead to more growth; and so on.

Big chunks of land in tribal areas must be handed over to Vedanta or posco because they will produce aluminium and steel; and they will be good for the country. When the people find that their land and mineral resources have been taken away, they start protesting, and when they resort to violence, the media immediately starts talking about reporting conflicts and giving an alternative point of view.

I am yet to see a balanced piece in the media before land resources are transferred. In fact, when land and mineral resources are transferred, they are called ‘incentives to the industry’ and everybody likes it; industry must be stimulated, stimulus packages must be given to them. The same media, when it comes to giving subsidies and food security to the poor, says, subsidies are very bad, this will lead to fiscal deficit, what will happen to the economy, investors will run away! Even the language we use is really the language of the dominant sections of society.

You have to see how the media helps people and how it does not report certain things. I have been told that of the 52 or 56 dollar-billionaires in India, about 32 have received free land or free mineral resources from the Government of India. So you allow this kind of primitive accumulation to take place in the name of growth and necessary development.

Reporting on migrants is another area of conflict—this takes place across South Asia, but you do not report on it. In India, there are internal migrants—20 per cent of the Indian population
is always on the move. What are the environmental conflicts that lead them to migrate in this manner? What are their rights? Do they have any rights at all? What are their problems? You do not see that in the Indian media.

Take the case of international migrants. There is a bias against international migrants. If you are Bangladeshi, you must be thrown out. I once interviewed Bal Thackeray. I asked him, ‘Are you against Bangladeshi migrants?’ He said, ‘Yes, my party is against Bangladeshi migrants.’ I said, ‘Is it because they are Muslim’ (because he is not against Nepali migrants, nor against Bhutanese migrants)? He said, ‘This interview is over.’ He said, I must be joking. I said, I am not joking. So he ended the interview.

So when we talk of South Asia, we talk of the free movement of capital; you cannot have free movement of capital without the free movement of labour. But our media will not report in a fair manner on these issues. Again, a nationalist perspective comes in.

So the Indian media’s reportage in conflict zones, whether it relates to migration, resource conflicts, insurgencies, people’s autonomy movements, or Kashmir, is extremely problematic. It is probably as problematic in Sri Lanka or in Pakistan.

Discussion

KAMAL SIDIQI: My observation has to do with the topic ‘Journalism and public opinion do not integrate’. I have this problem—apart from my print edition, we also have an online edition. In the online edition, we get these ‘most visited news’ and ‘most read news’. My publisher turns around and says, ‘Look, this is what everybody wants to read—stories on sex and crime, for instance—so why do you not put this on the front page?’ People seem to say that this is the kind of news they want. He also says that journalists have this ‘holier than thou’ attitude, whereby we decide what is to be the lead of the day. My fear is that a day will come when we will not be able to decide. The whole theory, that
we have studied and practised, and so we are the gate-keepers, will go away; you can see that already in the broadcast media.

AUDIENCE: My question is to Peter. When you talk about the social media, you distinguish between the new media and social media, but you do not talk about blogging. Where does it come in?

PETER CAVE: I had intended to talk about blogging. Blogging is very important. I do not consider it journalism, though; blogging is a mixture of opinions that are probably not subject to the norms or constraints of journalism. It is there for everyone to read; if we cannot sell a story to a news outlet, we can put it out there in the form of a blog and people can read it. Blogging falls somewhere in the grey area between social media and the new media. My personal belief is that it does not actually fit into the category of journalism.

CHAIR: Would you like to say something about the observation?

NAEM NIZAM: I am talking about our country’s situation in the 1990s; after the 1990s, with the fall of the military dictatorship, journalism took a big leap around our country. Public opinion was reflected in mainstream journalism and contributed a lot to democracy. It was a very strong and responsible media. When true journalism and public opinion go hand in hand, democracy will be strengthened and the world will be a better place to live in. That is my personal opinion.

CHAIR: That is exactly what is not happening! He says that public opinion is for salacious news, and that he should not give it.

AUDIENCE: I would like to ask this—you criticised the Indian media’s coverage of contentious issues in this country. I would like to get your opinion on the Indian coverage of Sri Lanka. Also, you spoke earlier about the failure on the part of the Sri Lankan government to implement the 13th Amendment in full. The
opinion in my country is that India imposes the 13th Amendment on Sri Lanka at gunpoint.

Chair: I should not be answering questions. The Indian coverage of Sri Lanka is exceptionally poor. The PTI has a correspondent there, and so does The Hindu. Otherwise, people occasionally write pieces. But nobody really follows Sri Lanka—or even the neighbourhood—in detail in India.

On the 13th Amendment, there is an Accord; it was a part of an Accord that the legitimate Government of Sri Lanka signed at one point; not only did it sign it, but President after President—including the current President—said he would give the Tamils 13th Amendment Plus. When he talked about 13th Amendment Plus, he did not mention that the 13th Amendment was forced on him, or on the Sri Lankan government at gunpoint. What I am saying is, forget the 13th Amendment; the 13th Amendment is technical.

Audience: The Sri Lankan President very clearly told the Opposition Leader of India that it was imposed on Sri Lanka.

Chair: I am saying that the 13th Amendment is a technicality. The question is: Should there be devolution of power in Sri Lanka? That was promised by several governments and not implemented. That will remain a contentious issue, and will remain a part of the TNA’s campaign. It will not go away till some form of devolution takes place.

Audience: There are politicians and there are people; we call them representatives, but we know about representation. There are grievances and there are aspirations. A lot of these things are inflated, and we should not assume that they arise from real conditions. Take a few realities like the Northern and Eastern Provincial boundaries, which were drawn by the British, not based on any objective criteria. You take the reality that more than 50
per cent of the Tamils live outside the north and the east. How devolution of power enhances the determination of Tamils overall, I am not sure. You take the reality that 66 per cent of money is given to provincial councils, just to maintain those very councils. So, the reality is this—what has been devolved is the ability to use violence on people.

Then, in 1987, when the Indo-Lanka Accord was signed—whether under duress or not—the LTTE was cornered. Nandikadal Lagoon, a metaphor of sorts for the end of the LTTE, took place in Velvettiturai at that time; had that happened, Prabhakaran would have gone 22 years earlier. These are the realities which form perceptions. What Resolution is going to be passed or not in Geneva—that is politics. In this instance, are we going with politics and politicians? In other instances, you would want to go with the people. We cannot do both.

CHAIR: We will sit and carry on this discussion, because this is really an internal discussion on Sri Lanka.

AUDIENCE: I want to bring in one conflict that we have not talked about—the conflicts generated by the processes of capital accumulation and capitalism. We do not talk about that. We just keep the corporate sector aside when we do our politics and journalism.

AUDIENCE: I want to know this—the expected role of the media is to report and not necessarily provide opinions. This also reflects conflicting opinions. This whole debate sounds like the politically correct and popular perceptions need to be present. As Yusufzai also mentioned, it cannot be reported as clearly as it is supposed to be. How do we deal with this? Also, what about the feasibility of the decentralisation of media? We always talk about the decentralisation of power. If we look at rural areas, we see that violence in remote areas is often not reported adequately, or at all. How do we deal with this?
AUDIENCE: Why do Indian journalists and other Indian news organisations still have to depend on foreign media? Are Indian journalists trained to cover foreign issues, for example, the Middle East crisis? Most of the time, we take news from APP, CNN and BBC. Are our Indian journalists trained to visit these sites, and can they move out of the support zone? What this does is that it provides the opinion of the foreign news agency. I want to know my country’s stand on that particular issue, be it Syria, Iran, or the Iraq war.

AUDIENCE: Take the example of India and Pakistan. The entire Indian media follows the Indian issue; they think that whatever India did is right, while the entire Pakistan media follows the Pakistan government. So there are no checks and balances; there is blind following and blind nationalism or a ‘patriotic’ media. How do we check this, and why do we have such a media?

KAMAL SIDIQI: I agree with the last question. This is how it happens in real life. In Pakistan, the allegation by India that five Indian soldiers had been beheaded was questioned. How did this happen—this question runs very deep in J&K. There are Pakistani casualties as well; civilians and army people die in clashes on the Line of Control. In Pakistan, the reporting was of an entirely different kind, compared to what happened in India. We were surprised at the aggressive nature of Indian reporting on the LOC. In Pakistan, I must say it was much subdued; initially, people were not even aware of it.

I agree that it has to be corrected and there has to be more effort to know what the other side is saying. We do not know much about what is happening in India, and also do not know much about what is happening in Pakistan, from independent sources. You said that there are only two Indian journalists in Sri Lanka; there are also only two in Pakistan—one from The Hindu and another from the UPI. No Pakistani journalist is in
India, reporting on India. What we know about India is mostly from Western sources. The same is true of Afghanistan; there is no Pakistani journalist in Kabul on a regular basis. They go there occasionally. There are many Afghan refugees living in Pakistan who report for the Afghan media, but there is no group, no TV, no paper represented formally or officially for the Afghan media in Pakistan. One reason is that the owners and big media organisations do not spend money; they do not want to send somebody to these very important countries. We should have somebody in Delhi; we should have somebody in Kabul; and in other such countries.

In reply to the other question that was asked—I agree that rural areas are ignored and the reporting is mostly urban, gender issues are ignored, there are conflicting claims—for instance, the story about the TTP spokesman from North Waziristan. We cannot say a lot, first, out of fear, and second, because that person will not call you again, and you will no longer get the story and the news. We are very keen to get all the stories and so the TTP spokesperson is a source of news sometimes; we want him to keep calling us, to provide us with news and statements. But then, this is a fact of life; we have to make compromises.

AUDIENCE: Journalists use social media tools, like Twitter, blogs and Facebook. But they do so very much on their own terms. It must not go unnoticed that social media has become very strong everywhere, and that it plays both positive and destructive roles. In Bangladesh, the social media was stressing on communal atrocities on the Buddhists. We must remain alert against such destructive attitudes on the part of the social media.

MOHAMMAD SHARIF HASSANYAR: Thank you very much. I have two responses. He asked about the social media and the example was Afghanistan. I can tell him that in Afghanistan, the army is not controlling the media, or at least, the army is not interfering
with the media in Afghanistan. As I mentioned earlier, a huge number of young and political persons are using social media like Facebook and Twitter. The Taliban spokesperson has Twitter and Facebook in Afghanistan.

The second response is with regard to what Yusufzai said: he mentioned that it is still not known why the Taliban spokesperson has not appeared on TV in Afghanistan, while the TTP spokesperson has. There are three reasons for this: the first is that the Afghan war is an intelligence war. Second, there are many people from the Taliban who call the media and claim to belong to such and such an organisation, and even provide names. However, it is still not clear who they are. Third, if they appear in the media, they will be arrested once they come to Afghanistan—like Dr Hanif, who was previously a spokesperson of the Taliban and was arrested in Afghanistan, and Mr Maula Fakir Mohammed, member of TTP, who was arrested in Jalalabad Province of Afghanistan, bordering Pakistan.

AUDIENCE: The question of embeddedness is not about being there physically, but bringing it into the story; our histories, our sorrows, we bring all that, so much so that sometimes I find I get more information from fiction. Perhaps we should not, as citizens and consumers of news ourselves, depend on the media; the Hindi media has a brilliant line—be the media. That is what we lack in the consumers of what we produce. If they are alert, we cannot bullshit too much. That is very important.

AUDIENCE: On the question of being accountable to public opinion—there is a certain small Australian media which is rather good at producing papers that provide basically news concerning basic instincts to the audience in papers like The Sun and the Sydney Telegraph; and it would be very sad if we get public opinion in that way.
In our recent elections, we decided that we would use the Australians to talk to the people on how they vote on the front page, rather than on the opinion page.

PRAKASH RIMAL: I am just providing information. Yusufzai says that Pakistani journalists are not stationed in Delhi, but luckily we have an office and a correspondent in Delhi, who reports on Nepali affairs in Indian cities and the State of India.

CHAIR: I invite Mr Narayan Swamy, who heads a news agency to answer: Why is it that the Indian media relies on foreign news agencies? Why do we not send our correspondents to even the neighbourhood—I understand they cannot be sent to Pakistan because of visa restrictions. But how come we have only two to three correspondents in Nepal and Bangladesh and two to three in Sri Lanka, and none in Male?

NARAYAN SWAMY: This relates to the lack of the larger picture on the part of those who run the media. Finance is only one part of it. In Pakistan, I understand that there is some sort of a reciprocal agreement—you have to have a journalist in Islamabad, and you are allowed to have two Pakistani journalists in Delhi. For some reason, as he rightly mentioned, there hasn’t been a Pakistani journalist in Delhi for quite some time.

Sri Lanka—there has always been a small presence, particularly by *The Hindu*. Bangladesh is not covered adequately at all. Nepal is not covered. Only having PTI people will not suffice because the PTI is essentially a news agency. It does not do analyses and commentaries.

My assumption—is that it is basically a lack of a larger global vision, where you feel that you have got to have your own people here and there so you get good analyses and good reporting.

CHAIR: Following a code of conduct in identifying communities becomes difficult because of television. The moment you show a Muslim house being burnt, and a man with a beard and a cap
crying, you understand immediately which community he belongs to; if you see somebody with a tilak, you know which community he is from. So TV has made it impossible [to hide the identity of the victim]. Suppose TV were to not show such visuals, social media would still do it. I do not know whether those guidelines are still valid, or whether we need to re-look at them.
THE CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE
THE CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Chairperson’s Remarks

Madhuker Upadhyay

Friends, I am very happy to have been invited to moderate this session. As you would know, in democratic countries a moderator is akin to a Speaker in the Lower House of Parliament. The Speaker does not speak. So my job is to facilitate you to speak, because we want to hear your points of view and the arguments that you put forward supporting your points of view, rather than me speaking.

But I would like to say one thing, which I have been observing for a long time, and which I must share with you all. In the media industry (and also in life), what you see depends on where you stand. That is your perspective. If you are standing somewhere else, you are looking at a different world; if you just shift your position, the viewpoint changes.

I will give an example of two journalists and their works, and that of one author. Look at Mark Tully, our esteemed friend and former colleague at the BBC. He looks at the world and looks at India, from a perspective moulded from having been in India. Look at his books; not the most famous No Full Stops in India, but Heart of India, which was published only a couple of months ago.

Look at British journalist and author, Ian Jack. He wrote about a football match that turned into a civil war, killing 60,000 people
in his book *Before the Oil Ran Out*. As a journalist, you discover that if you were standing at the right place, the perspective would be the right one, and you would get the story right. I am not saying that every journalist—at least in the beginning—has the liberty to have that perspective, because perspective is provided by someone else higher up in the hierarchy, like ourselves. But we should at least try and inculcate this in them from the beginning, so that when they have the opportunity to create things, they are able to see it in the right perspective.

There was a lecture at Oxford University where a very famous author from Nigeria compared two authors—V. S. Naipaul and R. K. Narayan. He said if one imagined a dark room, Naipaul would be standing outside the room looking inside to see the darkness, while R. K. Narayan would be standing inside the room, looking outside to see life, activity and hope. That is, just a few feet of distance changes the perspective. This perspective becomes even more important when you talk about conflicts, because the opportunities there are very limited; the window of opportunity is so narrow that you do not have the time to develop your stories from that angle. So you go with your perceived notions and do things that you think are right. That is why this training is very important.

In journalism and media, after facts, perspective is what counts. You do not compromise on facts; and if you have the right perspective, you have the story right.

Let me begin the proceedings of today. I call upon Ms Patricia Mukhim, Editor of *Shillong Times*, the oldest—and perhaps the largest selling—newspaper of Meghalaya. She is a member of the National Foundation for Communal Harmony and also a member of the Task Force on Centre-State Relations.

She has also been a member of the State Planning Board of Meghalaya for several years; she was conferred the Padma Shree, one of the highest civilian awards in India, in 2000. She has also received several awards for journalism. She writes a weekly column for *The Statesman* and *The Telegraph*. 
Her subject for today is: ‘The Changing Dynamics of Conflict Reporting in South Asia’.

The Changing Dynamics of Conflict Reporting in South Asia

Patricia Mukhim

Good morning friends. I’d like to begin by saying that dynamics change all the time, but conflict reporting unfortunately does not change; or we are so used to reporting conflict in a certain way that we find it hard to change our perspectives—or even to take a different perspective.

I come from a region that considers itself quite alienated from the rest of India, and it is the media description of the region that makes it all the more alienated. This description is that of a violence-prone, conflict-ridden region of the Northeast. There are seven states in the Northeast, but we lump it as one region and forget that there are different dynamics in every state.

We have had conflicts in the region since 1950, one of which is popularly known as the Indo-Naga conflict; we have different ethnic groups, which have constructed an idea of their homelands; we are what Benedict Anderson calls the imagined communities. The Indo-Naga conflict started in 1950 and went on till 1997, when the Government of India decided to hold peace talks with the Naga militants. From 1997, the peace talks have been continuing. The media tried to understand what the peace talks were all about; we are used to dramatising everything, and so we looked for the drama in the peace talks as well. After a while, though, we found no more drama.

When we fail to find drama in a process, we tend to become cynical and spread this cynicism around, unfortunately making those actors in the drama a laughing stock. Now we are saying, ‘perhaps the talks were never meant to succeed, and perhaps there
is no way out for India to resolve the Naga conflict—and so on. We have provided different constructions to the entire process of peace talks.

This has been a staple in the region because we have about 238 ethnic groups. All of these ethnic groups are looking for a homeland. When they do not succeed through peaceful means, they take up arms; when people take up arms, the government tends to talk to them. The message that the Northeast has received is this: you get nothing if you do not pick up arms. So the government then begins to sign accords with different groups.

Since we have learnt to dramatise violence, we have also learnt to dramatise the ceremonies of surrender. We make a big deal out of these ceremonies, but what we do not do, as the media, is monitor whether the arms have been surrendered, and if so, where they are kept, and what the potential for future violence is. Last year, in a particular state in the Northeast, the surrendered arms used by certain militant groups were used to create yet another cycle of violence.

So we do not actually monitor peace processes very well because there is no drama in the process. Sometimes I wonder if the media is a part of the conflict, whether we are inflaming raw passions, or whether we are a part of the peace solutions and peace processes. The conflict in this region seems never-ending, and we frame events through the use of certain words that we are very familiar with. By and large, we have become a very unquestioning media because opportunities such as this do not come very often. We have learnt to exclude voices and provide platforms to people who are powerful—because they have the arms—and we tend to steer away from most unspoken and unquestioned premises.

We hardly ever step out of the normal space from which we—as the Chair said—view the world, or gaze at the world from a different perspective. We have learnt to look at conflict from a very specific, localised lens. So it is sometimes important to sit back and take a look at how we are framing conflict in the media—in
the right way; or whether we have a vested interest in seeing that the conflict continues; or whether we step back and see if we have something to offer the peace-building process.

It is said that the truth has many facets. Do we, in the media, have enough time to devote to those different facets of the truth? This is questionable, because when we talk about the newsroom in the evening, we refer to it as a ‘battle zone’. There is no time to reflect, to retreat, or to look back, because you have to meet the deadline. It is said that good journalists do not suspend judgment on everything in their quest for objectivity. Certain facts have to be stated upfront; certain conclusions have to be drawn when certain things have happened; when we know, for instance, that there have been violations of ceasefire agreements, it is important that we write about them.

But we can only do so if we have researched the subject deeply, and if we do not listen to only one side, because ours is a very divisive arena; if we think of India as diverse, then the Northeast of India is even more diverse.

At the best of times, it is a very complex region. So making sense of the realities, even in times of peace, is difficult. When there are conflicts, this becomes even more impossible because everything is compounded and exaggerated.

Then we have the problem of pioneers. When it comes to the actors in conflict zones and the State, we sometimes demonise one against the other; when we report on human rights abuses, for example, we talk only of State abuses, and do not report non-State abuses. This prejudiced view is something that the media needs to reflect on.

Since we have very little understanding of the vocabulary of peace, we are used to running helter-skelter to places where bombs have shattered peace; we are used to responding to instances where you go and count the bodies—see how many people died and how many were injured. We are so used to the blood and
gore that we no longer know how to come back and see if we are over-reporting violence.

I hope a conference like this will also teach us the language and the vocabulary of peace. We now need to change; we have to become more literate in peace reporting, and conflict resolution can only begin when the dynamics of conflicts are transformed.

During conflict transformation, we need to report in a manner that includes people’s voices and helps people to become a part of the peace process, because conflicts do not necessarily end when the guns are silenced. As I mentioned earlier in the context of Northeast India, the State tends to make peace with people who speak through guns. When you make peace with violence, it is not really peace. It has the potential for future violence. It is time for the media to reflect on this, and not give too much space to the actors of violence, as we have been doing so far.

Now I would like to suggest a few points for the way forward. Perhaps we need to stop providing space and platforms to voices that ignite passion and take advantage of conflict to promote their political views.

We really need time and space for research. We need peace-education syllabi in colleges and institutions that teach media and journalism, because it is time to understand what conflict-sensitive journalism is. Journalists are people who have the least training—even ongoing training or capacity-building. We require greater exposure to capacity-building, and need to re-define news in places and regions that are prone to conflict. We also need to look at ourselves to see if we have triggered conflicts in the past, and perhaps we need to find more space for peace stories.

chair: Thank you, Patricia, for a very good talk, which raised many a point that needs to be thought about and pondered over.

I would like to point out four things that stand out in the
presentation just made: first, that the ‘dynamics of conflict change, but the conflict does not’. You have to take that into account, as she said very well. Second, she spoke about the ‘imagined communities’, and about the Indo-Naga conflict. But may I also add that there are many other areas in India and South Asia where such things keep happening repeatedly because we tend not to understand the dynamics of conflicts and do not realise that those dynamics change. We think that every conflict is a new conflict when in fact it is the dynamics that have changed, while the conflict remains where it was.

Third, the point about peace talks—the media looks for elements of drama in peace talks and if they do not find it, sometimes these talks are ignored or caricatured. At times, the media even creates drama in order to keep the story afloat and please the masters in the newsroom. Fourth, and most important, is the point she made about the language we use in reporting conflicts; we tend to borrow the language of the aggressors, the conflict-mongers. In the Gaza Strip, the Western media uses the term ‘settlement’, when it should actually be ‘occupation’. The difference between how you look at it and how you put it, and the words you use to describe it are very important in how you write your stories and how you present them in the media.

Chair: Thank you, Patricia, and we now move to the next subject: I call upon Toufique Imrose Khalidi. He is the Chief Editor of bdnews24 the first online newspaper in Bangladesh.

Future Challenges of Humanitarian Action

Toufique Imrose Khalidi

My topic is best suited for the representative of the ICRC. But let me try to address it; I have sat down with my colleagues and tried to put together some sort of response.
Humanitarian crisis is a result of both human beings and nature, of course. In Bangladesh, we are talking about perspectives; so I will try to draw upon some examples, mostly from there. Bangladesh, we have suffered from both man-made and natural humanitarian crises. Whenever Bangladesh has hit the global media headlines, it is usually because of one of a long list of disasters.

Let us first look at one of the man-made crises. In my view—and my colleagues agreed—such humanitarian crises are often the consequences of a systematic violation of human rights, on a scale that cannot be ignored even by our fatigued media lenses. Massive rights violations can constitute the core of the crisis, or it can compound some disaster.

Last year, around this time, a riot broke out in the Myanmar State of Rakhine between Buddhists and Muslims. The mayhem caused some 1,500 people to flee their homes in Rakhine and cross over to Bangladesh. Some Rohingya Muslims had begun taking refuge in Bangladesh way back in 1979. They started coming in much larger numbers from December 1991. I remember editing the copies sent by our correspondents there. I was then working for Daily Star. Very soon, a quarter of a million refugees had taken shelter in Cox’s Bazaar. There was huge strain on the Government of Bangladesh to feed all these people and maintain law and order.

Very soon, the Bangladesh government picked a fight with the UN body responsible for refugees, the UNHCR. They failed to agree on how to handle the refugees. Bangladesh highlighted the strain it was under; I still remember the voice of the Foreign Secretary. He was very angry with the then representative of the UNHCR in Dhaka, and refused to comply with what the latter was saying. The government stated that the tourist town—Cox’s Bazaar was the only tourist town at that time in Dhaka—was paying a very heavy price, and that law enforcers were struggling to curb crimes in the camps and beyond, as it was very difficult to keep an eye on a quarter of a million people. There were important issues of concern for the government that could not be discussed publicly.
I had access to one of the very secret documents of the intelligence agencies on what was going on there. Bangladesh is still paying the price; I probably cannot discuss matters in detail even today. As per the UNHCR, refugees are refugees; as long as the refugees are present, they benefit, and have something to do.

Could the media have played its due role at the time? This remains a question even today, 20 years on. I covered that crisis; and twenty years later, the Rohingya refugees are back in the headlines. The 2012 crisis has been as difficult for the media with regard to the humanitarian actors—caught up between conflicting parties like the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar—as well as for the security agencies on both sides of the divide.

Such scenarios, where the parties capable of influencing the work of the media and humanitarian actors have strong mechanisms of denial, secrecy, censorship, and coercion, constitute a common—and major—challenge. The future promises to be even more challenging as cross-boundary conflicts have unfortunately become more frequent.

My second point is, when crisis strikes, dealing with bureaucracy becomes a prime concern for both media people and paid workers. Information that may be vital to many lives is often filtered through, and gets lost in a complex bureaucratic web. One common example is the tendency of government agencies to suppress the number of victims in a crisis. Ferry accidents are very common in Bangladesh. The river transport regulators are accountable, and they will never let you know the real number of victims. The minister will tell you that it is an act of God; I cannot stop it.

The same can be experienced in the private sector, which is equally guilty. Most of the Bangladeshi economy is now controlled by private companies. Readymade garment factory owners are particularly notorious in suppressing the number of victims.

When factory accidents—if at all you are willing to call them accidents—occur, we see their true face. In today’s world, these are accidents waiting to happen. But they could easily have been
prevented. In Bangladesh, factory owners belong to a separate class, who would rather buy their way out of crisis than be compliant. In fact, anyone who can wield influence, experience unrestrained power, flout regulations, and get away with anything is a threat to our work in the media, and a huge barrier to the work of the aid-givers.

The latest issue to put Bangladesh under the global media spotlight is Rana Plaza. In the Western media, there were big headlines about the multi-storey mall that houses several government factories and other establishments that employ nearly 4,000 people; 4,000 people were working when it collapsed one morning. About 1,129 bodies were found under the debris; 261 were listed as missing; and 2,438 rescued in one of the largest rescue operations we have seen in our history.

It was broadcast live on TV channels; it is easy to ‘do’ news at the moment.

In my opinion, this is primarily a regulatory failure; the lack of enforcement of laws and rules has sustained both this culture of impunity and the greed of the people; these people drive cars worth close to a million dollars, with several such cars parked in the garages of their palatial houses. Bangladesh has very high taxes; a car that costs $100,000 in America will cost $700,000 in Bangladesh. And yet their children drive sports cars worth a million dollars in a city where there are not even 100 metres of straight road.

Events such as Rana Plaza and Tata Square expose once again our lack of preparedness in dealing with humanitarian crises. It is true, though, that we have learnt to live with floods—that is one of Bangladesh’s achievements. Far fewer people die these days in even severe floods. Cyclone preparedness is a lot better since the havoc caused in Urichar. Some older journalists will remember that in 1985, when General Ershad was the ruler in Bangladesh, the Indian prime minister flew in to Bangladesh for a day to express sympathy with the victims. Since then, cyclone preparedness has
improved a lot. Some of you might remember the December 1970 cyclone, which changed the political landscape of this region. That is also when the elections took place.

But if a major earthquake hits Bangladesh, the consequences could be apocalyptic. I used that word in a headline way back in 1998; we were doing a story and a sort of campaign-journalism for an English paper in unplanned cities like Dhaka, where unsafe buildings cluttered built-up areas. That story highlighted the estimated number of risky structures, the lack of rescue equipment and training, unauthorised developments, etc. We provided a list of buildings with faulty structures, but I know of no visible action so far. In the past three decades as a professional, I have followed every development in Bangladesh keenly; even when I go abroad, I would speak to my colleagues in Dhaka every day.

The recent factory fires, which have killed hundreds of people, have reminded us again how unprepared we are. Fire-fighting equipment could not reach a major fire incident recently. Hundreds of workers were trapped inside a burning garment-producing factory because of the two narrow lanes leading to those factories, which even the fire-fighters could not navigate. Then why allow factories to be built there? Who allowed it? Who gave them the licenses and the certificates?

We talked a lot about the social media yesterday. Social media helps in the move from rescue to rehabilitation. You can see an outpouring of public grief when disaster strikes. But the social media is unrestrained—I repeat this because this is a point that has made me very unpopular with some bloggers (who in fact apologised to me later, saying that I did the right thing). Two years ago, I made a major speech at our annual dinner. After that, I suddenly became unpopular. The bloggers started saying that I had called for control, when I had said, ‘Restrain yourself; do not lose this freedom’. Unrestrained, irresponsible dissemination of information causes problems here too; it led to major problems during the Rana Plaza accident. In the wake of the building
collapse earlier this year, social media activists in Bangladesh made appeals for food, funds, rescue equipment, etc. But their appeals are clumsy, sometimes out of context, and at times unnecessary. In one well-known incident, a big company responded to the call by providing a huge industrial crane, which created more problems than it solved.

I wish to make an important point: although several people criticised the work of the media, they could not raise their voices against the media because they would then be hounded. We are not good people, in Bangladesh at least. The media, in its mad rush to attract more eyeballs, sought to take this story forward to the extent that rescuers felt their work was being hampered by mediapersons anxious to fill in their time slots.

Let me conclude with the most atrocious media excess I have ever known. During the February 2009 mutiny in the Bangladesh Paramilitary, 60 military officers were killed inside the headquarters of the BDR, the Bangladesh Rifles. One broadcaster was interviewing one of the rebels live, effectively giving him the opportunity to make a televised speech when even the head of the government was not making one. That led to the mutiny spreading throughout the country, and there was a huge crisis. The owner of this TV channel later became the only one to win a second channel in the history of Bangladesh. While everyone had criticised his channel’s actions earlier, no one remembered it later.

The points I have tried to make here concern future challenges for us and for humanitarian actors; and these challenges will only get bigger if we fail to strengthen the political and regulatory institutions in our countries.

chair: Thank you. I would say, with regard to the points that you raised about the new media, which have made you unpopular, that you should continue in the same vein, because there is a need for restraint, and not just in Bangladesh. Social media can do wonders,
but they have to follow certain guidelines and ethics. This has to come about, and people have to speak about this.

Some very important points were made in this presentation, and I would like to flag some of them. He began by talking about violations of human rights. These are actually at the core of any conflict. If you can control these violations, if you have a perspective on them, perhaps conflict can be avoided. Conflicts are not accidents; you let them happen. They will happen if your eyes and ears are not open, and if you are not listening to people.

The second point from the media angle is denial. The secrecy of authorities and workers in the field does not help. They have to open up and realise that the media landscape has changed, and that they cannot continue to behave the way they were behaving 50 years ago. So the authorities—and even non-governmental bodies and organisations, including the ICRC—have to open up, provide information, and share things.

The other point I want to make is about migration. We see migration from Bangladesh to India; the issue is trivialised, and turned into political slogans for political gains. It is no longer a humanitarian issue but a political one, because political parties want to take advantage of it. One has to see it in that light, not just in the case of Bangladeshi migrants to India—particularly to Delhi—but on a larger scale, everywhere. You termed the media’s failure a ‘regulatory failure’—this remains unanswered. Who is going to regulate it, and how do you regulate it? Perhaps this can be answered later.

We move to the next subject. Which is ‘Social media and short internet reporting—either a bane or a boon’. I call upon Emad Abshenass, Senior Editor from Iran, who started his career in 1985 with IRNA, the Iranian News Agency. He is currently the Manager in Charge and Editor-in-Chief of the Iran Daily newspaper, an English language newspaper belonging to the IRNA.
Social Media and Short Internet Reporting: Bane or Boon?

*Emad Abshenass*

Dear colleagues, participants and future journalists, social media is so exciting that 10 minutes will not be enough to talk about it. Some of my colleagues took upon the burden both yesterday and today and talked about social media. I, too, have a lot to talk about.

Many nowadays use Facebook, Twitter and web blogs to communicate with relatives and friends, and find even more friends. It is a wonderful world, where you can always be in touch with everyone you know and love, talk to them, felicitate them on happy occasions, condole with them on sad occasions. Some even unanimously join social networks because they do not have the courage to exist as they are in public.

My father is 80 years old, and Facebook has perhaps saved his life. Were it not for Facebook, he would have had to stay home alone, and being alone would have destroyed him mentally. A short chat with everyone on Facebook, a little information from everywhere, keeps him cheerful and alive. He is able to communicate with all his friends and family members everywhere in the world.

Discussing anything can be a bane or a boon. This depends on our point of view, our intentions, and our way of thinking on that issue. For example, a knife would be a boon if it is used to cut bread, while using it to murder a person would make it a bane. So we can consider social media two faces of one coin. It will depend who is using the social media, and how.

Since the beginning of history, mankind was eager to live in communities and communicate with each other—from writing on cave walls and sending messages through smoke signals, we have now come to e-mailing, messaging, tweeting, and Facebooking. The purpose was, and still is, to communicate, send information and express ideas.

From the day the emperors started sending messages through
Chappar, fast post riders, who could take a message from the east to the west of the empire within a week, to now, when a message can be sent around the globe with just a click, the purpose continues to be communicating and sending information. About 100 years ago, the first newspaper was published in my country, where in the editorial, the Editor-in-Chief promised readers to unveil secrets and incidents within a week—people had to wait a week to be informed about what was happening in the country. I think the same thing existed in all other countries. But today, thanks to the huge role played by technology, you can be informed about what is happening in the world in just a moment.

Previously, only rich and influential people were able to access information, since information costs. They were able to interpret information for others in a way they considered proper. Today, though, information is cheap; but is it really free of charge? Of course not, nothing is for free. Every network has its targets and to reach its purpose, it interprets the information it has in the way it wants. We all know that you can write a story in different ways, just to reach your target; it depends on who is sponsoring the network, of course, as the one who pays the money has the right to choose what goes on the Internet.

The same applies to people. How can you be sure of the truth, and how can you access correct and uninterpreted information? The best way is through a reliable friend, but can you have a reliable friend everywhere in the world? Twenty years ago, it would have been impossible to have a friend in every country. Some news agencies used to spend huge amounts of money to establish offices all around the world, and yet be unable to get the truth from everywhere.

Nowadays, with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other social networks, you can have friends everywhere—friends who can be your journalists around the world, and tell you exactly what is happening in every point of the globe. Moreover, groups with common interests can come together and inform each other of
what is happening, or what they plan to do. Everyone knows the latest revolutions in the Arab countries would never have happened had it not been for Facebook and Twitter. All the arrangements were made, all movements and protests coordinated through social media. The news about the events taking place was published through social media. If people had no access to social media, they would never have been able to inform the world of what was really happening; and of course, the governments and the rich would have been able to interpret the news the way they wanted.

Now, social media is even more powerful than governments. On the other hand, social media is not used just to send information through the wires; as with the normal media, some are misusing this media for their own purposes. They even hire staff to write their own information. In some cases, so much news is distributed by proxy writers around the net, that it becomes hard to believe it is all a lie. This does not apply only to political issues, but to economic issues as well. For example, lately the rivals of Apple made a big campaign on the net, convincing users that if they upgraded their new iPhone 5 to os-7, it would become waterproof, just like the Sony Experia-Z. The propaganda was so strong that some believed it and upgraded their newly bought iPhone 5; you all know that the iPhone 5 crashed.

You can see how influential the social media could be and how it could be used. Most huge companies use social media to promote their sales. Their advertisements fill the media with incorrect information; unfortunately, they are able to influence a lot of people in the market. If companies can succeed in selling their products, then governments, politicians, racists, terrorists, and others can also succeed.

Most terrorist groups are attracting members through the social media. Some are even using social media to fool others, especially children, for sexual or other purposes. So, to judge whether the social media is a bane or a boon, you should first determine how, why and who is using this media.
Finally, I have to say that there should be some rules and ethics to rely on in the social media. Otherwise, it would just be considered a source of unreliable information.

Chair: Thank you. Very pertinent points were made. While he was speaking, I was thinking that there are real threats, as the conventional media has in a way been held by corporates—is there a threat of the social media being hacked by the corporates, and not just for their promotional activities? If they start controlling it, they will be controlling our minds. There are negative factors that one needs to keep in mind when thinking about social media, and how to go about it.

In fact, the point you made about the social media having two faces is a good one. I would go further and say that it has not just two, but three faces, as there is collateral damage—some people get hurt for merely having been there—caused by the social media. That needs to be taken care of—how to structure social media and still allow the free flow of information. The problem is that although it is called Facebook, it allows people to remain faceless. There are people who argue that there is no harm in being faceless, but that is not true. How can we convert those faceless people into real faces is also a point to think about.

Emad Abshenass mentioned the Arab Spring, and the role that the social media played. We have seen it in other parts of the world, too, particularly in 2011 in India, during the movement against corruption led by Anna Hazare.

We have seen the power of social media. However, it is yet to be seen what that power, when unleashed, will do in the end.

You also stated that there are places where the social media is more powerful than the governments. That would indeed be a situation fraught with danger. All of these issues are very important, and need to be reflected upon. Thank you very much.

We continue with the new media. I will now call upon Mehboob Khan, who is a Visiting Professor with the Mass Communication
Research Centre here in JMI; he was earlier with the BBC. He happens to be here with us today and he has kept a keen eye on the social media, and I have included him because he has a point to make. I call upon him to talk about social media and Internet reporting.

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Social Media and Internet Reporting

Mehboob Khan

Thank you. Emad has successfully mentioned the good points of social media, but as we know, there is also a negative side, especially of Twitter and Facebook.

I will mention a few things. In older times, it would have taken one week to send information. Sometimes, delaying information, especially if it is bad information, is a good thing.

But in the age of Twitter, a single word on Twitter can ignite a fire. In a recent incident, former PM Manmohan Singh was in New York, and a journalist from Pakistan said something objectionable. That ignited a debate in the Indian and Pakistani media, which overshadowed the New York context and the talks with President Obama and later with President Nawaz Sharif.

Again, in January this year, there were two incidents on the Indo-Pakistan border. I covered Indo-Pak border from 1990–2000, and have witnessed those areas myself. Beheading or killing soldiers of the opposing army is a normal occurrence on any border. There is usually routine coverage of such incidents.

However, in this case, a few days later a line on Twitter stated that an Indian soldier had been beheaded by the Pakistani Army. The issue exploded like wildfire. The Indian media picked it up from Twitter and it created the frenzy throughout the country; as Bharat Bhushan said yesterday, several anchors were asking, supposedly on behalf of the whole nation, ‘How can we tolerate such killings of soldiers’? Even the Government of India was
hesitant to mention it to international observers or the UN Mission.

I learnt of the background from my sources: a few days in advance, Finance Minister P. Chidambaram had talked about proposing some cuts in the Defence budget. Also, a particular Western company that sells weapons to the rest of the world was very keen to enter into an agreement with some defence establishments. It is now an open secret that India buys its weapons from different countries, and does not produce its own.

So with that single tweet, the whole scene was changed. A week later, the entire country was engaged in that debate; even the Opposition leaders said that they wanted six to 10 Pakistani heads in return for one Indian head. So the public was kept engaged in that debate, by which time the Western company finalised its deal for several crores of rupees. Also, Chidambaram could not go forward with his proposed defence budget cuts. So these are the flip sides of social media; but as journalists, we have to decide whether to allow social media to hijack issues or speak on behalf of an entire nation.

Last month, we saw one negative aspect of Facebook, during the Muzaffarnagar riots. Somebody apparently downloaded a video from Facebook and circulated it; they even made CDs and distributed them to ignite communal feelings. That resulted in the killing of many people.

I would like to mention the background of the video. Around two years ago, there was an incident in Sialkot, Pakistan, where two boys were beaten to death by a Muslim mob. This became a huge point of debate amongst journalists and the social media fraternity, even in London, and we discussed it a lot among our South Asian friends.

The person who circulated this in order to utilise this opportunity was very clever because it fits the context; it does not explain who the boys were, but the murderous mob definitely comprised Muslims from Sialkot. In the new narrative, the two boys were turned into Hindus from Muzaffarnagar. That helped
to ignite hatred amongst the local community, who never checked whether the video was genuine. I have several more examples. But I will only say that we need to be cautious when using the social media for our personal lives, and more so when using it for our professional lives as journalists.

Chair: Thank you, Mehboob Khan. He was referring to the scheduled meeting between Manmohan Singh and Nawaz Sharif in Washington. The remark, as most of you will remember, was “dehati auraat”, a village woman, which is derogatory to village women, and ideally it is they who should have protested. But it became a political issue, and political parties tried to take advantage of it.

All this is happening because the social media is somehow hijacking the news space that was conventionally the domain of newspapers, and later of TV channels. Social media is here, and social media will stay; but both social media and society has to learn how to use it. This does not signal the end of conventional media; conventional media and social media can survive together, provided social media follows some rules and ethics. This is the point that every speaker has made. But how does one go about it without resorting to censorship? Perhaps free flow of information with internal regulation is the answer; TV channels in India are doing so, and how effective they are is a different question. But they have their own regulatory authority; the Press has a government-appointed, quasi-judicial body, the Press Council of India; and Editors have the Editors Guild of India. People can be hauled up or praised.

These points about the social media will remain relevant because social media is growing, and is not a fully matured entity like other media organisations. As it grows, there might come a time when the social media realises where it stands and what it has to do.
To continue with the new media and social media debates, I will call upon our friend from Bhutan, Rinzin Wangchuk, to talk about new media.

He is one of the seniormost working journalists in Bhutan, and is the Editor of *Kuensel*, Bhutan’s national-language newspaper. He has been contributing stories on crime, corruption and investigative issues, in both the English and other language editions. He assumed the post of Editor in January 2006 after working as Deputy Editor for five years.

![New Media: Making or Breaking Connections](image)

*Rinzin Wangchuk*

I will talk briefly on the media scenario in Bhutan before I touch upon my topic.

Bhutan’s biggest challenge throughout its history has been surmounting the communication barrier. Located in the midst of the Himalayas, the natural barrier cuts off villages, communities and people from each other, thus leading to the sprouting of so many languages, customs and cultures.

Until just about 50 years ago, not much of Bhutan had changed; the country was still under what is known as ‘splendid isolation’. However, when the country decided to embrace modernisation in the 1950s and 1960s, investment in communication facilities was the biggest priority. With the launch of the first Five-Year Plan came postal communications, followed by analog telephone systems, the building of modern roads, print media; quickly followed by broadcast media (radio) in the early 1970s, and to cap it all, television and Internet in 1999.

Today, news media has transformed the landscape. The natural barriers have been overcome, people have come together, and interaction between communities is unprecedented. Today, this country of just over 600,000 people has more than a dozen newspapers, half a dozen radio stations, and two to three television
stations are in the offing, on top of the one that exists presently.

Social media has carved out its own place in the Bhutanese mediascape. Since the Internet broke its last frontier with its introduction in 1999, its usage has picked up tremendously. Beginning with offices in the early days, Internet connections are now present in nearly every urban home and on mobile phones. As of the last count, one in three Bhutanese—or about 200,000 people—use the Internet through smart phones. On the social media front, there are more than 100,000 Bhutanese on Facebook, which means approximately one in six people interact through this tool. The number on the Twitter front is also going up, although it is at present limited mainly to the educated, urban lot.

Equally noticeable is the fact that traditional mainstream media is now making forays online and going virtual. Large numbers of Bhutanese today are getting informed through online media, rather than through conventional outlets.

Now, coming to the new media and making connections, social media has transformed the information-sharing culture. Bhutan is known for oral communication and for being a gossip society. Word-of-mouth, a once powerful medium, is no longer as powerful as it used to be. Chat-rooms like Facebook have taken over. All levels of interaction—between friends, family members and professional colleagues—have gone virtual. This shift in the interaction culture is driven mainly by the youth, who spend hours every day catching up with people online. As the youth go online, the elderly people are forced to follow suit in order to stay in touch with their young relatives. Online communication has overcome one of Bhutan’s biggest barriers—the mountainous topography, which divided Bhutanese communities and villages for thousands of years.

As elsewhere, the new media is quickly supplanting the role of the traditional media. Most information is today accessed not from hard-copy newspapers, but from online sites, where the news tends to be shorter, to-the-point, and a lot easier and cheaper to
access. Journalists are no longer the only sources of news; common people are able to churn out information from their own sources and share it with thousands through Twitter, Facebook, and other online linkages.

The information gap that may have existed before between different communities, depending on their proximity to the centres of information, is being removed. Information and knowledge are vital to the advancement of today’s societies, and in Bhutan, too, the new media is making a significant difference. Previously, a newspaper would take several days, or even weeks, to reach certain parts of Bhutan, but today, thanks to online tools, information reaches almost everyone at the same time.

The new media has also become a rallying point that helps to build national cohesion, unity and togetherness. Tiny it may be, but Bhutan has people from various ethnic backgrounds, and social media like Facebook is helping to overcome these differences and foster closer bonds and understanding.

With regard to ‘New Media—breaking connections’, Bhutan has always been proud of its close-knit society. The family bond is traditionally very strong, and anchored in some timeless values. Within this structure, staying together under one roof or frequent physical interactions are norms that helped to build the relationship. These family values, however, are now under threat, as social media like Facebook, Skype, etc., take over. As a result, people are probably becoming lonelier, as the virtual can never really replace real interaction.

Even as online media helps to spread information and knowledge, its uglier side has been very damaging, especially for a small country like Bhutan. Social media has granted people the freedom to say and do what they like, and this has encouraged many to wear a cloak of anonymity and attack whomever they do not like. There has, in fact, been such a proliferation of anonymous users who cannot be tracked down and who were creating so much discord and misunderstanding that Bhutanese people in the recent
past were put through a soul-searching experience of sorts. While probably, in a bigger country with a larger population, such things would go unnoticed, in Bhutan every small accusation or smear on one’s character becomes known, and those at the receiving end have gone through painful experiences. It has caused family rifts, divorces, and unnecessarily soiled the image and reputation of many good people who were denied remedial recourse, either through the court of law or any other avenue, as the enemy was unknown and invisible.

This impact climaxed with the political elections of 2013. A large group of people suddenly emerged online, mainly through Facebook and Twitter, and began a relentless attack on those participating in the political process. Their attack was vicious, bordered in extreme cases on defamation and even outright indecency, and often spread like wildfire. Sadly, while their vitriolic accusations carried hardly any grain of truth, their victims were put through untold sufferings. This online behaviour had such an impact that it might even have skewed Bhutan’s electoral process.

Now people are discussing whether social media can be regulated, like the regulations imposed by the Chinese government.

Discussion

chair: Thank you. I would ask you the same question that you asked in the end. Do you have an answer to that?

rinzin wangchuk: No, we do not, because we discussed it last week, too. Our colleagues said it should not be regulated, but that we need to create awareness amongst the users, which is very important.

chair: Thank you for that answer. The points he was making were basically positive—a country with a hilly terrain has overcome that topography, and the difficulty of information reaching from one
point to another, through social media. You can now reach out to people, and the density of people per capita who use the Internet for personal communication seems to be very high in Bhutan; and so the dangers, in a close-knit society like Bhutan, are also very great. This is the case in hilly areas of Northeast India, and smaller countries elsewhere.

The oft-repeated point is that this shift is impacting traditional value systems, which have survived for thousands of years till now. Suddenly, though, a new technology has entered your home. You can just log in and connect to anyone you want. However, as Rinzin Wangchuk was saying, in a close-knit society, where every second person knows you, this could even wreck lives. So, the threats from and impact of social media are very real.

One has to think about how to regulate this. Probably, by the end of this august gathering, we might find some answers to some of the questions that have been raised.

I will now call upon our next speaker from The Maldives, Hassan Ziyau. Who will be talking about ‘Reporting at Sea: Does the Media have enough means and knowledge?’

Ziyau is the Senior Editor and a TV host at Maldives Broadcasting Corporation. He began his career in 2004 at TV Maldives. Ziyau is a well-known name and a famous face in the Maldives. He is known for his TV presentations and the prime time talk show aired every week. Ziyau has also participated in and represented Maldives at numerous international conferences, training workshops and programmes over the years.

Reporting of Sea: Does the Media have Enough Means and Knowledge

Hassan Ziyau

Before coming to Delhi, I asked someone whether I was supposed to give a speech or a presentation. I was asked to give a speech.
I thought that might be really boring, because I am not good at giving speeches. After seeing this well-equipped room, I thought, why not use the facilities here and make it a bit interesting.

This is what I am going to do in the next 12 minutes, through a Power Point presentation.

First, I will be talking about the Maldives. To understand my topic, you will need to understand my country, the situation in which we live, and who we are.

I will then be talking about the media landscape in the Maldives.

Then I will come to my topic—‘Reporting at Sea: Does the Media have enough means and knowledge?’ I will be taking some examples from the Maldives while talking about reporting at sea.

Everyone was asking me about the political situation in the Maldives. To understand this topic, you need to understand the politics behind it because it plays a vital role—whether you are talking about economics or social problems, or tourism, politics plays a huge role. So I will be discussing the political situation, and will update you on the political situation in the Maldives.

Everyone of us has something in common—we understand the language of music. I will tell you about the Maldives through music. We will play music or a video song for two minutes, and after that, I hope you will have understood something about the Maldives.

Maldives is a beautiful country located near Sri Lanka; it has 1,190 islands, out of which 200 are inhabited. There are more than 100 resort islands; we have a unique method of tourism in the Maldives—one island, one resort. The population is 300,000; 99 per cent are literate, and it is a 100 per cent Muslim country. If you are a Sunni Muslim, only then can you become a Maldivian, as has been stated clearly and strictly in the Constitution. Multi-party democracy was introduced in 2008; it is an infant democracy, struggling to maintain democratic values.

Coming to the media landscape, there are six private TV
channels operating right now in the Maldives, and we have the public broadcaster, where I work. Private broadcasting was introduced in 2006; public TV and radio were state-controlled. Since 2012, it has been heavily state-controlled and regulated by the government. In 2012, the Parliament passed the Maldivian Broadcasting Act; it selected a Board of Directors and asked to form a Public Service Broadcaster using the State Broadcasting equipment and staff; however, when the Board was selected by the Parliament, the government refused to hand the State Broadcaster over to the Board.

The government stated that the Parliament was controlled by the Opposition, who wanted to hijack the state media for its own propaganda. In 2010, the Board of Directors took their case to court, which ordered the government to hand over the State Broadcaster and form a public broadcaster. Again, the government refused.

In February 2012, the then President, Nasheed, resigned; he said it was a coup attempt that forced him to resign. Following that, there was a change in the government. After the change, the public broadcaster was formed, and the state media was handed over to the Board of Directors selected by the Parliament. It is now run by that same Board of Directors, and is called the Maldives Broadcasting Corporation. We have one TV channel, TV Maldives, and two radio stations—one FM and the other AM. Then there is the Raj TV.

The two channels on the left are aligned to the current government and former President, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. The first one is owned by a business tycoon and is aligned to the current President, and the second is owned by the richest man in the Maldives, Qasim, the vtv; he is also a Member of Parliament and a Presidential candidate. The third is owned by the current President, Dr Waheed—technically, his brother owns it; Channel 13 is owned by former President Maumoon’s Party, the PPM, and controlled by his half-brother, Wami; the last, MTV, is controlled
by the religious groups, and we call it the Maldivian Peace tv.

Then there is Raj tv, the only channel aligned to former President Nasheed.

This is the channel that was attacked on Monday (which Mr Adam mentioned in his opening remarks), when I was on my way to New Delhi. I did try to talk to people, but I did not get much time as I had a flight to catch. All the equipment and studio were burnt down in the attack. They are now trying to come up with new equipment and begin broadcasting again. What is interesting is that Raj tv was attacked on the day that the Supreme Court was to announce the verdict on the vote-rigging case. The police have said they have identified the suspects, and are trying to bring the culprits to book. However, that is unlikely to happen any time soon. Raj tv and mtv have blamed parties aligned to the current government, specifically the half-brother of former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, for the attack, as theirs is the only pro-democratic or pro-mdp tv channel in the Maldives.

This is the aftermath of the attacks. We tried to bring a fair and balanced coverage, especially during the Presidential elections. We produced and presented special programmes for Presidential candidates as well as special election programmes, including various profile programmes, voter education programmes, and other educational programmes.

CHAIR: I would appreciate it if you could come to the subject given to you; we want to hear you about that topic—the adequacy or inadequacy of the media in the Maldives.

HASSAN ZIYAU: Maldives is 99 per cent sea and only 1 per cent land. In the Maldives, speed boats and ferry boat rides are as common as bus rides in Delhi; we travel by sea everyday. The small islands are not interconnected, and so we depend on sea travel. Accidents happen quite often at sea, and they are not reported in the media. For one, we do not have enough technology, equipment, or the
proper means to report. For another, the political situation and other issues dominate the mainstream media, and even the social media. So these incidents that happen at sea, or those related to the sea, are completely ignored in the Maldives media.

One of the worst accidents in the recent history of the Maldives took place in 2004, where 26 people died. Here, too, we were unable to report it properly because there was no coverage in some parts of the country; we do not have enough reporters to go out with the security forces or coastguards to cover the event; and we are unable to get proper connection or coverage from different parts of the country because those islands are isolated and located far from the capital, with limited connection between the two.

Then, in 2004, there came the tsunami. That was one of the biggest challenges our country faced; and we, being the public broadcaster, tried to cover it. We had live coverage for the whole month, over 24 hours; we tried to present updates from all over the country; we received help from various regional broadcasters, including Indian public broadcasters like Doordarshan, in covering the tsunami.

We do possess knowledge on such matters; Maldivians are experts on the sea, with the SAARC Coastal Management Centre also being located in the Maldives. We have research centres on resort islands, and they conduct research on reefs and corals, and study the climate change effect on the Maldives.

In 2010—you might have heard of this—there was an underwater cabinet meeting hosted by the then President, Md. Nasheed. This was a very famous event, and even the international media heard of it, and the CNN was there to broadcast it live. The Maldivian media requires technology, expertise and proper training for our journalists and media personnel.

Currently if there is an accident at sea, the coastguard sends us alerts, and then sometimes we do go with them to cover it, and sometimes it gets ignored because of the other political and social issues dominating the media.
Coming to the last part on the political situation—we had our first multi-party democracy in 2008, with the first ever multi-party elections. After that, on 7 September 2013, we had the first round of Presidential polls; former President Nasheed got 45 per cent of the votes; 25 per cent was obtained by Yameen, the half-brother of former President Gayoom; Qasim, the richest man, got 23 per cent; and the current President got 10 per cent. Qasim went to the Supreme Court, accused the elections of rigging votes, and stated that his refusal to accept the result. So, on 24 September, the Supreme Court issued a temporary injunction and postponed the second round (scheduled for 28 September). On 7 September, the Supreme Court issued their verdict and announced the first round of elections; so the second round will be held on 19 October. The current President has declared his support for the PPM, the half-brother of former President Gayoom, and the ruling government and other parties will be forming a coalition to support one candidate, to try and ensure that Nasheed does not come to power again.

Chair: Thank you. We now have at least some knowledge, as hardly anything is known about the Maldivian media. It seems, from what you have told us, that the media has constraints—there are not enough reporters, not enough technology connections, not enough training, etc. But I also gather that the media is either owned by the government or by one or the other political party, through proxy. That will be a problem, because then a free media will take some time to arrive in the Maldives; but it has to come, sooner or later.

You began with a very good promotional video, adding some music to the conference, which was otherwise all about conflict and war. Thank you very much for your presentation.

Now, I move to the next subject. The speaker is Kamal Siddiqi, the Editor of Express Tribune. He is from Pakistan. Express Tribune is an English-language daily, affiliated with the international
Express Tribune. He has been in the media for close to 25 years. He has been affiliated with other leading media houses, including *Dawn* and the *Jang* Group. He previously taught journalism at Monash University in Australia. He is currently Visiting Lecturer at Karachi University’s Journalism Department.

**New Threats, New Responses by the Media**

*Kamal Siddiqi*

Thank you very much. I would like start by saying that Pakistan is one of the most dangerous countries to report from. We have possibly the highest number of journalists being killed. But that is half the story; the other half, which is not told, is about abductions, threats, attacks, etc. Earlier this year, our offices were attacked. We are part of the Express Media Group and yet our office was attacked; the gunmen just pulled over and fired around 30 bullets. We still cannot figure out why it happened. This is the situation that we live in, in Pakistan today. This is the situation that journalists have to face.

I will focus on two areas—Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a tribal area, and Baluchistan—both of which are conflict areas in Pakistan. I would like to talk about our predicament in terms of what our threats and our responses are—the limited responses through which we, as journalists and media houses, have tried to address these issues.

As an Editor, the first problem is: What do we report and how do we report it? What is it that we want to bring out? For example, in stories on drone attacks, there are claims and counter-claims—one side claims these attacks have been conducted, while the other side denies it. There is also the issue of verifying who has been killed. My predicament is that I do not have anybody neutral in those areas, who can individually verify the truth. For example, Hakimullah Mehsud, the Chief of Tehrik-i-Taliban, is claimed to
have died; but then he came back from the dead.

My problem, sitting in Karachi or in Lahore or in Islamabad, is that first, we do not have people on the ground because it is difficult; those people reporting are pressurised from both sides. So it is very difficult to report such matters and individually verify what is happening. The other aspect concerns the verification of the spokesperson—when claims are made during conflicts; for example, when somebody telephones and takes responsibility for a certain bomb blast, etc. How do we verify whether the spokesperson actually belongs to the organisation he claims to represent? We do not have faces for these people, as they only talk to us over the telephone. This is one of the threats or challenges that we face.

The other challenge—and Patricia also talked about this—is: should we be giving a platform to terrorists? I will provide a recent example. The Tehrik-i-Taliban is also active in Karachi now. They issued a letter that said that if they were not paid a ransom, they would blow up a building in Karachi called the PSO House, which is one of the tallest buildings in Karachi. Had we gone ahead and printed that, it would have created a huge panic. We decided against it and held a discussion; some reporters said, what if something did happen tomorrow, then the blame will be on you for not having warned the people. But I said that it is not our job to spread rumours or fall into the terrorists’ agenda; if the police issues a statement, then we will go with it, but we will not run with this on our own. So these are the kinds of decisions we have to take.

Other than that, disappearances are very common in Baluchistan, and possibly also in tribal areas, where people just vanish. How do we report them? On the one hand, we are told that as a matter of record, we have to report such incidents and at least say that such and such a person has gone missing. But there is no FIR or police record of such a person going missing; there is no witness; and family members will not talk because they fear that if we report this, whatever chance there is of the person returning
will also disappear.

The other prominent issue concerns the discovery of bodies—a person will go missing and his body will be discovered in another part of the country; this happened in Baluchistan, Pakistan’s largest province (in terms of its area). A person goes missing in Baluchistan, and his body ends up in Karachi. How do we report this? The question again is: Should we be reporting it, in terms of escalating tensions? How do we report the death of people, even when they have not been officially confirmed? This happens quite frequently in Baluchistan. When somebody dies, some party lays claim on him, and then the violence erupts in Baluchistan.

As an Editor, I have my predicaments that concern when I have to bring out a story; for example, we have correspondents in places like Peshawar and Quetta (the capital of Baluchistan). We have a reporter there, but he cannot report on these incidents. If he does, he might be threatened. We have a sister-publication called *Express Roznama*, which comes out in Urdu. The office of *Roznama* was attacked for this very reason—they reported something that one militant organisation felt should not have been reported. We cannot put our own reporter in danger; we cannot expect him to report on the atrocities and attacks taking place.

But on the other hand, the Baluchistan High Court has said that if you report incidents that the militants ask you to, we will start proceedings against you. The Chief Justice, otherwise a very sensible person, has said that he would put the journalist in jail. So it is a very difficult situation. It is no surprise that a lot of journalists have been killed in Baluchistan for various reasons, mostly to do with reporting.

The other course is to fly in people from Karachi or Islamabad; we have done this in the past, even in Karachi, when we were reporting on the MQM—we had people from Islamabad reporting on it. But this does not always work because the person would not have any local knowledge. Second, the bigger issue would be: Once you bring in a person and he returns and reports on it, what would
be the likely fallout? We have to tread a very careful line, even when it comes to flying in people. Without local knowledge, this person can be kidnapped; he can be misled—so it is very difficult to send journalists into conflict areas as they are now seen as part of the problem, and not the solution.

We talked a bit about this yesterday as well—about embedded journalism, where the army takes you in and shows you around. But we cannot do so; it was possibly John Pilger, one of my favourite Australian journalists, who said that the first casualty of war is truth; once you go as an embedded journalist, you became a fair target. What happens is, the Tehrik-i-Taliban can take you out if you go as part of a military convoy, because you become a part of one stakeholder. Your neutrality is thereby compromised.

I remember the Falklands War. The only way to go to the Falkland Islands, if you were a British journalist, was on a ship, and that ship took a week to reach the Island. By that time the journalists had become friends with the army officers; they had exchanged notes and had had drinks, and so you could not expect them to be critical in their reports. The same thing holds true in Pakistan; if one or the other side takes you in, you cannot be expected to be neutral. So embedded journalism is a problem.

The problem also is that we have no alternative. How do we stop reporting? We cannot take one side or the other, and so we might as well give it up! This, too, is not a solution.

There is yet another predicament. Conflict zones are areas of humanitarian disaster, and you often have organisations that are otherwise not acceptable doing some really good work. For example, whenever there is an earthquake or a flood, we have organisations like the Jamaat-ud-Dawa going there and providing support. These organisations would otherwise have another identity. How do we report them? This is also a challenge for us—how do we put things in context? Religious organisations are the first to respond to disasters, even during the recent earthquake in Baluchistan. How do we talk about them?
Other challenges accompany reporting in conflict areas. For example, sitting in Karachi, we would do stories (as our paper is a national paper) and put our people in Peshawar in danger. This happens quite often. Also, when our reporters have to call up militant organisations, how do they identify themselves? Because giving out your real identity could land a reporter in trouble at a later point. These are the challenges.

Now, on to the responses. There is a common example given in Pakistan about journalism; in TV reporting, the cameras are insured, but the cameramen are not. How have you responded to this? We have talked about safety in numbers; the first thing is that journalists’ unions and press clubs have levied collective pressure when journalists are under threat. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Rahimullah’s province, we have the Khyber Union of Journalists, which actually has group insurance for its members.

Another interesting initiative has been taken by the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists; they have an agreement whereby they give relocation money to journalists who are under threat in one area. For example, there was a cameraman in Karachi who shot footage of a member of a paramilitary organisation shooting dead a mobile phone thief. That footage got the cameraman into trouble. So the PFUJ actually gave money to relocate him to another part of the country, because he was facing threats in Karachi.

The second thing—which Rahimullah mentioned yesterday—is the code of conduct; we have put in place a very basic code of conduct in Pakistan, whereby if you report on bomb blasts, you will not show your bodies or body parts; more important is not rushing to the site, because in instances of bomb blasts, there is almost always a second blast; there have been cases in Peshawar where journalists have died because they rushed in. The third thing is that you will not go after breaking news. Certain things have to have some time lag before they are reported. This code of conduct is very basic, but it is a start.

Another response is what Patricia was also talking about—
we are training journalists. We are saying that first, you have to understand the difference between right and wrong, and then go ahead with the reporting. Most journalists in Pakistan—and I am sure, in many parts of South Asia—do not understand the difference between right and wrong when they are reporting; bias creeps in, and they often get into litigation. How do you report but not give out the names of rape victims, for example—these are the things we are trying to do.

Another important thing that we are trying to do in our organisation is provide awareness of information security; for example, using WhatsApp instead of BBM or texting, because governments are becoming very invasive, they can track you and your emails. So if you are calling someone over Skype, you have to understand which organisations will cooperate with the government when you are reporting, especially in conflict areas; what it is that is being monitored. You have to be very careful about the kind of information you are exchanging.

I want to talk about a couple more things—for social media, like for every news organisation, there should be a policy. For example, if I am tweeting, I will be held responsible for what I say, especially if it causes my organisation embarrassment. For example, I remember a case where we took action against a staff member who was tweeting from the newsroom. Imran Khan fell down, and this person tweeted that everybody in the newsroom was laughing. This is very serious for us; we might have been laughing, but we are supposed to be a neutral newspaper. This is again an issue of privacy. So we have a policy in place for tweeting—on Twitter or on Facebook, you cannot let out information that you would otherwise not have access to.

This is a point that I would like to make to all the journalism students: when you go for an interview, remember that your prospective employers are going to check your Facebook pages and your Twitter accounts. This is public knowledge, and something you should keep in mind.
Returning to the issue of responses, you have to have some sort of policy for social media in place. Also, when we are reporting from sensitive areas, we remove the datelines. We try to keep people guessing about where this story has come from.

I would like to conclude by saying that there has been a lot of talk about social media, and how we should control it. The bottom-line is that you cannot control it, even if you try. Sitting here now, as an Editor of the old school, I am as pained as you are when I see the current situation. First of all, social media is not journalism per se, but I know it well; I use Twitter to get to stories. The beauty of Twitter is that it is unfettered. People can say what they want. It is a source of information that you cannot control. If my government has banned YouTube and is looking for ways to try and stop Facebook and Twitter, that means there is something right about these social media.

This is my response to people who talk about managing these sites.

Finally, there are three things about which we have to be mindful as journalists—first, we should be mindful of biases and planted stories, especially in conflict zones. Second, get the story out. Third, safety is most important. Note that if you are a dead journalist, you will not be able to tell the story. So your safety is most important.

CHAIR: Thank you, Kamal, and for the last line especially. If you are not there, neither is the story, and the world will not be there for you either!

A few things occurred to me while you were speaking. You said that when terrorist groups issue handouts, the dilemma is whether to use them or not. We have learnt from experience that in other parts of the world, like in Northern Ireland or Punjab in India, they force you to carry the press releases that they issue; not only do they force you, they also tell you that you cannot edit it. Is that
a problem? Do you face that too?

Second, you said that sometimes it is better to defer or delay the story. Is there peer pressure? Are there groups who try and steal a march so they could be first with the story? The madness of India’s TV channels is to be seen—they are always eager to be the first with a story.

**KAMAL SIDDQI:** We are learning from you! You fix your act and we will fix ours!

Yes, there are pressures [from terrorist groups]. I edit an English-language paper. In the larger scheme of things, we do not matter that much. English readers are very limited; they wield a lot of influence and are very powerful, but they are limited. The bigger issue is with the Urdu papers—not only are they told to take the stories, but they are told not to edit them and also told where to place them. The smaller the paper, the greater the pressure, and eventually they have to give in.

**CHAIR:** One more point about embedded journalism. There are areas that are inaccessible otherwise. Do you wait for someone from there to give you information, someone who may have a vested interest? Or would you prefer one of your journalists to go there, even as embedded, so that he could at least see for himself? If I were the Editor, I would allow embedded journalists to go there.

**KAMAL SIDDQI:** In the case of the Baluchistan earthquake, we first sent our own journalist in, who went with an NGO; once she returned, the army also went with us. So we do both; we never refuse a free ride! If the army wants to take us in, if nothing else, it provides a very good experience for the journalist; but we remain mindful that that is not the whole story. As long as we are clear about that, it is fine.

**CHAIR:** In India, particularly, with the Defence Ministry junkets,
what happens is that you are taken to an area that is otherwise inaccessible, and then when you return, you write your stories. However, they have to be vetted first; so they go to the Ministry, and then the stories come back to you with, say, a couple of lines deleted, and after that, you put it out. You run the risk of doing this even today; if the Defence Ministry takes you, it does not allow you to write anything that might go against them.

**KAMAL SIDDQUI**: Just to add to what Kamal was saying, embedded journalism in remote and inaccessible areas should be taken up; for example, all foreign journalists who come to Pakistan want to go to the tribal areas, to places like Waziristan, but they cannot because foreigners are not allowed to enter tribal areas. Now, what they do is, they ask the ISPR, the public relations wing of the army; the army arranges helicopter rides. They are flown from Islamabad to Waziristan on a day trip after being briefed by the army; they also meet some select people, obviously some of the tribal elders; and occasionally, they are taken to the bazaars, too. Every foreign journalist is dying to go on these trips because otherwise, you cannot visit places like Waziristan. So, if you’ve come from, say, Washington or New York or London, and you want to go to the tribal areas because you are writing about these places, if an opportunity arises, you might take it.

**CHAIR**: But there is also a problem of a multiplicity of authorities in border areas, or conflict zones particularly. If somebody is taking you, there will be 30 people opposed to your being there. They would do anything to harm you or stop you. I remember from personal experience—we were taken to Suchul on the China border by an Indian agency, and the Indian army was opposed to our visit. So we were arrested. The army arrested us and kept us in Suchul for three days, merely because we accompanied one of the paramilitary groups operating in Suchul area, who wanted to show us their work. You go there with one agency and you earn the ire of another; this can even be government agencies, and not
just private non-State players.

We now move to the final speaker of this Session. He is from Nepal, Prakash Rimal. He began his career as a journalist in 1988 with *SPARK*, an English social monthly magazine. He writes and edits for the magazine; in his long and active career, he has had the opportunity to work with Nepal’s key media organisations—Gorkhapatra Corporation, the Kantipur Group, IMN, and the Space Time Group. Currently, he is Deputy-Editor of *Himalayan Times*.

The Struggle to Balance Urban and Rural Coverage

*Prakash Rimal*

As you know, I am the last speaker; and as the last speaker of the session, I have a huge responsibility to keep the audience awake for the next 10 minutes or so.

It is a huge challenge indeed to strike a balance between urban and rural reporting, primarily because of four things. One is the concentration of resources; second, the focus on politics; third, that journalists all around the world might not be keen to leave their comfort zones; and fourth, the skill level.

The first point is about the concentration of resources—Nepal’s media is largely Kathmandu-centric. So almost the entire resources—certainly more than 80–90 per cent—in terms of investment, audience space, reporters hired, editors, events, are concentrated on Kathmandu. Newspapers all around the world are actually based on events. Most of the events take place in and around the capital city, which is Kathmandu. Almost 60–70 per cent of the headlines that you will see tomorrow in the newspapers will be Kathmandu-based. Does this mean that we do not have reports or stories coming from outside of Kathmandu? No, we do get stories, but if you look at the proportion, it is not convincing and we could really do a lot more.
There are newspapers like mine; we have TV channels based in Kathmandu and more than 300 FM stations all around the country—but again, these TV stations are located in Kathmandu, and the FM stations all over the country are largely located in the district headquarters, which are urban centres in the regions. Newspapers published from Kathmandu and TV stations located there do have their district correspondents, but they are concentrated in the district headquarters. This means that if something happens in remote areas of the districts, their access to information is very limited. Often, they do not have access at all. Nepal is a very difficult country, full of hilly terrain, especially in the northern areas. So if some event takes place, or if some natural calamity occurs, most of the time the reporters are unable to make it to the areas as there is no road link or ordinary transport. So what we normally do is depend on the bits and pieces of information that we can gather over the telephone, which is extremely difficult.

If you look at the content of the Nepali media, whether in English or Nepali, there is a lopsided focus on politics. Almost 60–70 per cent of the coverage is of politics. Perhaps this is because it is easier to cover politics. A lot of politics reporting is based on who said what. You do not really have to do anything; you can easily put words in the mouth of the speaker, and provide very good quotes, always. Another reason for the focus on politics may also be because we do not want to get out of our comfort zones. Reporters working in newspapers, radios and TV channels have their own relationship networks with particular sources. It is always easy to get stories from them because they need you, and you need them.

So if you look at the content, you will see that the sources are usually very regular—perhaps three to four leaders from a particular party, who are always making news. Why does this happen? This could also be because of the skill-levels of the journalists. Journalism in my country is relatively young; it began after the political change of 1990, just about 25 years ago. Although
the growth of journalism is very professional, the skill-level is not very good because media institutions all over Nepal do not really invest in training. We have no in-house training system; my own newspaper, the Himalayan Times, is the largest in Nepal, but what per cent of our resources or revenues do we invest in training people? These are some of the challenges, because of which we have not been able to do justice to the issues.

Most of you are aware of the context and situation of Nepal. Nepal receives a huge amount of money through ‘remittances’. When migrant labourers go outside the country, they leave their families behind. We do not have any stories on the families, the difficulties that they might be undergoing in Nepal. Their ‘remittances’ are actually keeping the economy of Nepal going. For example, the impacts of climate change are felt by the farmers living either in the southern plains of Nepal or higher up in the mountains, but about 80 per cent of the Nepalese are farmers (although Nepal imports a lot of foodstuff, mostly from India). The farmers have their issues, but these issues do not find space.

Having said that, is it true that the Nepali media has been completely urban-centric and has neglected all issues from the districts and provinces? No. In terms of events—particularly if these events are able to bring in politicians from Kathmandu—we are doing a lot, but the real issues are not being mentioned in the mainstream media. We could probably do better in the days ahead. Let us see.

Discussion

Chair: The problem that you are talking about, the media’s obsession with politics or with the rule of proximity, should not mean that a newspaper published in one area covers only the neighbouring areas, and forgets all about remote areas. But look at the coverage of Northeastern states in New Delhi—hardly anything gets
reported. You know very little about what is happening there. This is the case with all media organisations—they remain focused on their own areas of publication.

Yet another dangerous thing is happening in India, particularly—multi-edition newspapers. In Haryana, which has 13 districts, there are 13 editions. A newspaper would have 13 editions from each district, and the neighbouring district would not know what has happened in the third or fourth district because every political story is localised.

So you are narrowing things down to suit your reach and your circulation figures, but you are cutting people off from one another. That is another risk that you run when you go in for focused reporting, or focused presentation of newspapers and channels.

This would be a general complaint—life beyond politics gets very little space in the newspapers, and also on TV.

So with this talk by Mr Prakash, we come to the end of the speakers’ session. The floor is now open for questions, or points or observations.

AUDIENCE: I have a question for the speaker from Pakistan. He discussed the difficulties faced by journalists in his country. Could he explain the outside elements who are creating this situation, because I see that people blame the government in power and the opposition, but they do not realise that there are outside factors, international elements, that cause these issues. I would like to know who the international players involved in Pakistan are.

My question is to Mr Emad. This has been discussed earlier: Do you think there should be a regulation on the social media, keeping in mind the present scenario and events that took place in Myanmar?

The second question is to Mr Kamal Siddiqi. You said that when a national disaster takes place in Pakistan, religious organisations are the first to go and help. Perhaps in your country, it is humanitarian aid that is being provided. But in terms of the
Western media, does this happen? How do you perceive those things that are done by the Jamaat-ul-Dawa, keeping in mind the relations with India and the Western world?

AUDIENCE: Can I make an observation? There has been so much discussion, we have heard Mr Yusuf and Mr Kamal, and the issue of the Taliban has also been reported a lot in India. We found that people like Muslim Khan and Baitullah Mehsud have become very popular. In India, too, we use the reports released by the Taliban to talk against Pakistan. So we give them a lot of publicity when we do not need to do so. The point I want to make is that when we talk about responsible journalism in a country like India, we do not need to report on the Taliban or their statements in such detail; however, we continue to do so because it serves the purposes of setting our own nationalism and talk about the problems in Pakistan.

AUDIENCE: My question is to the speaker from Nepal. Climate change is a burning issue in today’s world. Living in a mountainous environment like Nepal and Bhutan, what are the challenges that you face in gathering information about climate change impacts, especially with respect to rural reporting and reaching out to inaccessible and topographically remote regions in Nepal?

AUDIENCE: My question is to Patricia. She said that among a number of fields, journalists are the least trained. But my experience has been different. Journalists in Pakistan are very well-trained. They undergo a lot of training; sometimes, while conducting training sessions, I am told that they have attended nearly two dozen sessions before this! But perhaps the training received is not properly formulated. That said, training on security and professional issues are now held everywhere in my country.

Second, you mentioned dramatising the peace talks. How do you do that? Please explain, because we are now going to have peace talks in Pakistan! We want to learn about your experience.
Third, Mr Prakash mentioned migrant workers, and the way they contribute to the economies in countries like Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan. I know that Indian migrant workers send $71 billion a year, and it is $15 billion in Bangladesh and Pakistan. This is a lot of money. They are keeping the economy afloat in many countries. But their plight and sufferings, and that of their families, is not properly covered. How do you ensure that?

AUDIENCE: You talked about the social media and the powers of the social media. You also talked about the clampdown on social media in conflict areas. What could we do in those circumstances?

AUDIENCE: My first question is to Mr Kamal. Are you overstating the power of the social media by saying that it is more powerful than the government? For example, the Arab Spring and the media in China are two different things. In the first case, the government did not control the social media, but in China the government continues to control social media like Facebook, YouTube or Twitter. So how do we view social media now—as a tool of change, or otherwise?

You said that reporters do not have sufficient technology at their disposal to report sea accidents, which are very common in the Maldives. But again, you said that you have the technology to report everything. How do you correlate the two?

CHAIR: Most of the questions were directed to speakers. I will name the speakers, and they can then answer the questions. Other speakers who wish to contribute can do so later.

The first question was for Mr Kamal—the difficulties faced by journalists and religious groups who are often the first responders in times of disaster, and also about the deaths not being reported correctly because you do not get the correct figures. And there was one more question addressed to him.

KAMAL SIDDQUI: As far as the question about the ‘outside elements’
is concerned, we report in good faith. But two incidents have shaken that good faith, in terms of our reporting as well—in the earthquake that took place in northern Pakistan, a lot of aid-workers came in to help Pakistanis. At an international level, it was acknowledged that a number of those aid-workers were actually engaged in other covert intelligence work as well. It is very easy to say that our government is threatening us and not allowing us to report. But as you rightly pointed out, there are other factors as well.

Another thing to which I would bring your attention is the Osama bin Laden case, in which the perception—true or otherwise—is that medical tests (they call them polio tests) were conducted by international NGOs in Pakistan to track down the family. Pakistan is facing a crisis in terms of polio. But as a backlash, even if write that polio is a problem, a lot of people say that it is merely an American conspiracy. In terms of reporting, there are other factors too—and thank you very much for bringing it to the table—it is not just the government or political parties or militants, but other factors and players that come into play.

With regard to the religious organisation, Jamaat-Ud-Dawa was just an example. Keeping this organisation aside, I will talk about religious organisations in Pakistan that are known for spreading terror; they might be banned in Pakistan as well, but remain active in the country. My point related to our predicament as journalists—when we see them doing such good work, and at the same time know from our experience that they have another identity, how do we report them? Do we say that they are doing good work without giving the background of the organisation?

About bodies in Baluchistan, we cannot always assume the identity of the perpetrators. So our first challenge, when a body appears somewhere, is not to name or suspect one side or the other. Our challenge is to report it and leave things alone, and see how it goes from there. So in response to your question, we do not name the suspect because that would make things even worse.
PRAKASH RIMAL: Is language a barrier to rural coverage? Yes, to an extent, but largely no. It is a disadvantage for English readers, because if something happens in the far-off districts or in remote areas, then the version they get to hear is from the English press or the English news. What happens is that a person speaks in Nepali and the district correspondent sends the report in Nepali; this comes to Kathmandu, where it is translated into English and then finally edited. So what is actually reported could be far removed from what had actually been said.

Second, the quote might have been tampered with. Often, the editors try to make it a better quote, although they are not supposed to make any changes in quotes but report them verbatim; but the desk editors do make changes here and there. The readers of the Nepali language press get a little more rural coverage, because events happen in the Nepali language and readers of the Nepali language can easily relate with the districts where the news takes place, unlike in English, which prefers a district coverage.

To the question on climate change, the reporting or analysis of climate change is slightly difficult because the Nepal government itself does not do a lot of research. When there is no official channel, we have no access to information. Any research on the impact of climate change is largely diverted down to the media in Kathmandu through the UN agencies. So we do not have first-hand access to knowledge; second, there is the remoteness of the place where the impact is actually felt by the people. The reporters are largely based in district headquarters. The impacts are felt particularly by people up in the mountains. Many times, the newspapers and TV channels have used freak or unique events and portrayed them as the impacts of climate change, which may not have been the case. Anything out of the ordinary is attributed to climate change.

The third challenge is the level of knowledge and the expertise of the reporters. We get the reports from a very general correspondent, who is also an expert in sports, business, politics,
and the economy. So he is not really competent to understand the issues of climate change.

Also, reporting on migrant workers and their families is quite a challenge. Nepal receives roughly about $5 billion worth of remittances (Rs 500 billion). But where is the money going, what are the families doing? These issues are largely unreported. There was a recent story in The Guardian on Qatar—thousands of people are dying, while Qatar is constructing its infrastructure. This reporter did a story by focusing on Nepali migrants. They have the resources and the zeal to go to the villages and track down the families of migrants. We do not have that liberty, as we do not have resources under our control. So for the moment, we will have to rely on The Guardian or other sources to hear the other side of what is happening to the families of migrant workers.

Chair: Thank you, Mr Prakash. There were more than a couple of questions to Mr Emad on the regulation of social media, clampdown on social media, over-stating the social media, etc. Keep the responses brief so that we do not delay the proceedings.

Emad Abshenass: I will try my best. First of all, there is a difference between regulation and restriction. I do not accept restrictions. You cannot restrict human beings in any respect. The social media is banned in China, Iran, and many other countries. Russia is going to ban it. But despite it being banned in Iran, most Iranians are on Facebook; even the President and Foreign Minister are on Facebook—and their pages are very popular! When a politician knows that the social media can get him a lot of votes, why should he not use it? So although it is banned, they still use it! Therefore banning anything will not solve any problem.

But there should be some regulations on its use and on the materials distributed through the social media. For example, if someone writes something dangerous on Twitter or distributes a film on YouTube or on Facebook, it will not serve the society. It
will only end up killing thousands of people. For example, we have seen a lot of YouTube movies purportedly coming out of Syria; but when we checked them, we found they were from Iraq and other places. As a journalist, I have some obligations. One of them is to check the source of the news that I am getting, and to be sure that when I publish it, to ensure that the person who put this on the net had no intention of disturbing the peace. Without regulation, it will end up in the manner that you see in Kashmir, Syria, and other places.

I say that the social media is becoming more powerful than governments because governments in many countries are afraid of it; they are only afraid because it is becoming more powerful than they are. That is why they are trying to ban it.

Another issue raised is this—governments do not like transparency. No government in the world would like transparency, especially when a network takes a side. Neutrality is very important for a network. But when a network or a news agency or a newspaper takes sides, it should expect to find reporters being taken to jail, etc. In Egypt, especially, no reporter or journalist has the right to do that; the Egyptian government does not give journalists a license to work inside Egypt in order to retain the right to take the journalist to prison. This happened with us—we had journalists in Egypt who were taken to prison, and they called me (because I am on good terms with the Egyptian Ambassador) to help them get released.

Chair: A question about Pakistani journalists being either over-trained or not trained was directed at Patricia.

Patricia Mukhim: I will answer your second question first, which was about peace processes and how to report them. We, in the media, have certain conditions and responses. We privilege some news over others. Conflict reporting is very newsy, it is very action-oriented; a lot of adrenalin is pumped into the story. But
peace reporting is more about semantics and a long drawn-out process. The fear is that the media does not give enough time to these processes, and might delegitimise the actors and the peace process. We do not have enough training on peace journalism. If we have war correspondents, I do not see why we cannot have peace correspondents as well.

With regard to the first question, you are very fortunate to have well-trained journalists. In India, the farther you go from Delhi, the worse it gets. You do not need qualifications; if you are able to write a few things, if you are a good observer, you are taken by the newspaper houses because journalists are the worst-paid people in this country. So in such a situation, where young journalists are very impressionable and ready to sell their souls, how do we get a totally unbiased and unprejudiced story out and expect them to understand the nuances of what is happening around them? So we do get some training on general reportage, but very little, and nothing on conflict reporting.

Chair: Thank you, all the speakers.

With this, we come to the end of the session, and also to the end of the Conference. The discussions in this session were both thought-provoking and insightful. To draw any conclusions or to say that something was said and something missed out would not be fair, because everyone made a valid point from their own perspective, depending on where s/he stood. So I return to my original point that what you see depends on where you stand.
CONCLUDING SESSION
CONCLUDING SESSION

Tasneem Meenai

It is a privilege to be bringing a very successful conference to its conclusion and to have been associated with the proceedings of the past two days. In this last session, we will have concluding remarks by Marek Resich, currently the Communication Coordinator for the ICRC in India, Bhutan and the Maldives. Mr Resich is from Geneva, where he studied International Relations and specialised with an MA in War Studies. Before joining the ICRC he worked for an NGO and specialised in conflict resolution in the South Caucasus. Within the ICRC he has worked in Jammu and Kashmir and Nepal, and has been Communications Delegate in Peshawar. Mr Resich’s remarks will be followed by a concluding address by Professor Obaid Siddiqui.

Marek Resich

The past two days have been a veritable feast of ideas and topics of discussion. It’s not possible to summarise all of them. So what I will do is take four angles that I hope will be relevant—the first has to do with the issues debated by all the colleagues in this room: the independence of the media and its limits, the role of social media,
impartiality, the limits of impartiality, the role of governments and patriotism, the reporting of humanitarian affairs and the linkages that it has (which is basically being politicised), the importance of source verification, who has access to the media, how and why—these are just some of the important topics that were raised by many of the speakers.

We also had some recommendations emerging from this conference; it is important to mention them. One was an idea that emerged yesterday about the events on the LOC—the idea was to have more access and more responsible reporting, including on the humanitarian efforts going on there now. Let us see if this recommendation is taken up.

Another idea was directed towards the ICRC. I feel that I should respond to this—why not help reporters when they go to some conflict areas, and enable them to report. My answer would be yes, we do; it has been done in the past, in different contexts. Now, though, it is a very difficult thing to do in terms of logistics. So it is not that we are doing this every day and sending people all around the world, but it is possible.

Another recommendation that I felt was interesting relates to the importance of research—research the topic that people are reporting on, in order to make an informed argument. This came out in several speeches.

Coming to my third point, I really appreciated the fact that all the speakers spoke on the topics that they were given—some were trickier than the others. But what was also interesting was that everyone brought his/her perspective from his/her own country, by providing us with information about the current challenges in his/her country. This was very interesting and important, in order to share these experiences together.

Another point was the safety of journalists; this also came out quite often in different speeches.

Now, I would like to share a few quotes that I really liked. I hope all of you will like them as well; they were made by the distinguished
editors in this room. One was that humility is important; it is important for us to be humble in the face of our ignorance.

The second one is that the best propaganda is truth, as stated by Mr Rahimullah. Patricia said that we need to be more literate in peace reporting. I really liked this one, as this conference is on conflict reporting, which is true.

The fourth—and very important—was by Kamal Siddiqi: Safety is the most important thing for a journalist, just to be on the safe side.

A little word on the ICRC’s role in this conference—why we are very happy and interested to organise such events with JMI—we work in the same places, and reporting on conflict, as has been said here so many times, is complex. One of the complexities relates to understanding, at times, some of the legal frameworks that can and should apply in different situations.

The ICRC brings this expertise in the name of International Humanitarian Law or the Law of Armed Conflicts; one of the things that we encourage and are happy to discuss—also in our interaction with you—is that when you return to your countries, many of which have ICRC offices, you can contact us if you seek more clarity on this body of law. It is also to create this link between you and us on this issue of International Humanitarian Law.

We held the first conference in 2006; it has been going on for several years now. Now we’ve had this one—this is something we want to continue with, and engage with you because we feel that there is an interest on the part of different participants to bring the different issues in this region together on one platform.

My last point is on ‘some of the ways ahead’, or ‘the follow-up’. We have been putting some of the information on our Facebook page, called ‘Reporting on Violence and Emergencies’. We put up some content like pictures yesterday, and shall put up more today too. We will encourage all the editors to link to that page and also continue the discussion.

We will be sending an email with links to the Facebook page
and to a dedicated page on the ICRC website, where we put up information; we will also send all the editors the link whenever we upload pictures of the events. So you will be able to access all of that. We have also created a hashtag on Twitter for our conference.

We will be issuing the proceedings—some cameras have been running here the past two days; we will upload some of the speeches or interventions on YouTube (of course, with your permission).

The speeches, as has been the tradition, will be transcribed; so they will also be available to the students, should they want to refer to them. I am sure you saw them in the Welcome Packages; it is a good thing to be able to remember what was said and the different points raised.

Last, but not the least, the ICRC’s Delhi Office has a Newsletter; the next one, obviously, will feature this ‘Editors’ Conference’. We also have an e-version of our Newsletter, which we shall email to all the editors, the students, and our colleagues.

With that, I would like to say how important it is to stay in contact; I hope there will be many more conferences like this. Thank you very much for the past two days. It was a real pleasure.

tasneem meenai: Thank you. May I now request Professor Obaid Siddiqui for his remarks?

Obaid Siddiqui

Ladies and gentlemen, I do not have enough words to tell you how pleased I am with the outcome of the deliberations and discussions that we have had since yesterday.

Kamal and Marek have both made my task easy, because Kamal excellently summed up almost all the important issues that we have debated and discussed over the past two days in his presentation. Similarly, Marek also flagged some key issues.

I want to say two things—one is about the social media because we have talked a lot about it, today in particular. Social media has
provided a platform for like-minded people to come together. This is perhaps its main strength, and perhaps also its main weakness, because if like-minded people like marginalised communities and oppressed people come together and raise their voices through social media, it is good; but at the same time, those who preach hatred and violence, those who are against humanity, can also come together.

The second point is this—of course, it provides a platform for people to unite, but can we use social media as a reliable source of news and information? People who come together actually have well-defined perspectives; they are neither neutral nor objective in their approach. Which is what leads to a one-sided view—for example, people who support the BJP will definitely ignore all its weak and negative points, and similarly, Congress supporters will do the same. So I am very reluctant to accept the social media as a reliable source of information or news.

The next point—raised by one of the students yesterday—was: why is it necessary for us to have journalism or media schools, why is training essential? Patricia made this point very well. I remember the days when, if you had a good command over the English language, if you could write good English, you could become a good journalist. But times have changed. The reporting of events has changed a lot. So training and education are both absolutely essential.

Unfortunately, media organisations do not pay much attention to the training of their journalists. Even if they have studied in a media school, they need some sort of training afterwards, particularly if you have your own house-style. For example, I have worked with the BBC for a long time, and the BBC has its own house-style. So in order to imbibe that house-style, reporters or correspondents or producers organise training sessions; in fact, they spend quite a lot of money on them.

It really pays because if you are well-trained, it benefits everyone. For example, there is a course for those who go to conflict zones;
it is compulsory for those journalists to attend that course, which teaches them how to behave, the kind of clothes to wear, how to move around there, etc. Unfortunately—and I say this as a media educator—when I look at the syllabus of various courses, I find they are completely, utterly outdated; in the past 20 years or so, the media has changed completely, and with the advent of 24×7 TV news and the proliferation of social media, the situation has changed even further. I was thinking just yesterday that we now have to include social media as a subject in our curriculum. It is important for us; and it sometimes can be very useful.

For example, take the case of Twitter; if Shashi Tharoor tweets something, it becomes news. Politicians and celebrities are using social media to voice their opinions on various issues; it then becomes a very good source of information, as you can follow up that statement and develop it into a story.

The last thing I want to say is this. When I moved from radio to TV, I was working in a leading media organisation in this country as a News Editor; if you go to any print or newspaper newsroom, you will find a number of TV sets there. They follow these channels for breaking news, and pick stories up from there. Similarly, if you go to a TV newsroom, you will find in the morning meetings a huge bundle of newspapers under the desk of the editor. He picks up stories from there. So I am very concerned about this monotony, because they are following each other. That is why you find similar lines or similar angles, same sound bites and the same sort of conclusions. These are some of the issues that we have to discuss and debate, and try and find some solutions to.

We have a very good project in the pipeline—we are planning to publish a handbook for journalists on violence and conflict reporting. We may be able to do it in the next one year, and I think it will serve the purpose for which we have organised this conference.

My colleague Tasneem Meenai will formally thank all of you, but I also want to thank all the delegates who accepted our invitation, came here, and participated in this conference. I am
also impressed by the students, who took a great interest in this conference and patiently spent time in this room. I hope they have benefited from these deliberations and discussions.

\[\text{\textit{Tasneem Meenai}}\]

This is one of my last announcements now!

It is my most pleasurable duty to be able to acknowledge the contribution of all the people who made this conference successful.

I will be echoing what Mr Marek and Professor Siddiqui said, with respect to our being highly satisfied with the outcome of this conference, its proceedings, and the enthusiastic participation that came through in the past two days.

The ICRC, no doubt, has been the lead organisation in bringing this idea to us at the JMI. Professor Obaid Siddiqui very ably led us from the front, taking up all the responsibilities with respect to organising this conference. I wish to place on record the tremendous gratitude that we have towards the ICRC, for placing trust in JMI to host this particular conference and bringing all of us here together.

All three organisations that I mentioned in the Inaugural Session have a stake in what was being discussed. Just as Professor Siddiqui mentioned, the students have gained a lot.

In our centre, where we talk about conflict and peace, the MA students—especially those doing their MA course in Conflict Analysis and Peace Building—have gained immensely from the proceedings here. They also have a course on Media and Conflict in one of the semesters. So there is a logic to all of us coming together here, and I think I needed to iterate that.

However, all the people who came together need to be placed on record—who contributed what, etc.—because each of us has worked towards making these two days possible.

The Head of the Delegation of the ICRC, Mary Werntz, was concerned about how this would be possible. I must share with the participants that your visas were a major issue; until they arrived,
we were not sure that the conference would take place. So to that extent, all the officials from the ICRC—Mary, Marek, Surinder, Ashish, and the others who came here and discussed the progress on a daily basis—my gratitude to all of them.

I wish to thank Professor Obaid Siddiqui’s office—his Assistant Registrar, his teaching faculty, the members of his technical staff, who have worked tirelessly, covering the entire proceedings of the past two days—they have been of tremendous support, recording all the proceedings for us.

From my own Centre, Dr Kaushik, members of the staff—Zeeshan Anwar and Urmila, Israr, two of my PhD students who have been meticulously taking notes as rapporteurs (Saia Jaleel and Meer Nazir, sitting at the back); four of my volunteers who were here—Nobna, Asurya, Sagnik and Zaki. I make a special mention of them because they did a tremendous job trying to find seats for everyone in a crowded room. The overwhelming response that we had yesterday meant that several people had to sit on the ground, and many others were seated outside on the staircase. My apologies to them—we could not accommodate everyone in here.

My thanks to the students of the Mass Communication Research Centre, students of the Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace & Conflict Resolution for their enthusiastic response, and continued and sustained interest in the proceedings. My thanks go to members of the staff who work for these conference halls—Mr Akram and his team—and at the Saeed Hall and Anees Hall, for providing us with all the facilities and being available for all the help that we required.

I must thank my Chairs—Pamela Philipose, Mr Bharat Bhushan and Mr Madhuker Upadhyay—and also all the speakers here, because it is because of them that there was substance in this seminar. Thank you very much.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Adam Roberts is South Asia correspondent for *The Economist*, based in Delhi, where he oversees political and general coverage from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, among other countries. Adam joined *The Economist* as a writer in the Foreign Department in June 1998, with a particular focus on developing countries and transnational issues. He has been in India since 2010. He has written a book about a mercenary coup attempt in Equatorial Guinea, *The Wonga Coup* (2006), published in Britain, the United States and South Africa.

S. M. Sajid, is currently officiating as the Vice Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia since July 2013. He is the Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University since June 1, 2013. He served as Registrar of the university from January 2010 to May 2013. He is also the founding Director of the Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution which he headed for two years in 2004-05. He has served as Honorary Advisor to Centres of Higher Learning in Jamia, Director of the Academic Staff College and also as Officer on Special Duty at the ajk Mass Communication Research Centre for two years in 2003-04.
Mary Werntz is currently the ICRC’s Head of Regional Delegation in New Delhi covering India, Bhutan and the Maldives. Ms Werntz began her career in the ICRC in 1995, as an Urdu interpreter in Kashmir, carrying out the first ICRC detention visits in India. Since then, she has served in various capacities all over the world. Since 2004, she has been heading various ICRC delegations including Azerbaijan, Nepal, the Regional Delegation to the United States and Canada.

Pamela Philipose is a senior journalist and former Editor of The Indian Express newspaper. Presently she is Director of Women’s Features Service (www.wfsnews.org), the only women’s feature news agency in South Asia that has been extensively working for the better living of the women across South Asia. She is also author of several reports written on women’s issues.

M. R. Narayanswamy took to journalism in 1978, shortly after his graduation from the University of Delhi. He has worked with the United News of India (UNI), Agence France-Presse (AFP) and The Strait Times in Singapore. He is now based in New Delhi and works as Chief News Editor with the Indo-Asian News Service (IANs). He is author of several books including three famous books on the Sri Lanka conflict: Inside an Elusive Mind, Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrillas, and The Tiger Vanquished: The LTTE Story. He has focused a great deal on conflict reporting and has covered several countries in South Asia and the Pacific.

Shamindra Ferdinando joined the The Island newspaper, a Colombo-based privately-owned daily in June 1987 as a reporter. He covered the second JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) uprising in the late 1980s for the newspaper, as well as the conflict with the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) until its conclusion in May 2009. Ferdinando is now the news editor for The Island.
Hashmatullah Radfar started his career with the “Good Morning Afghanistan” radio programme where he worked from 2006 to 2012 as a reporter, analyst, presenter of political, human rights roundtables and investigative programmes. He has designed and created a series of investigative programmes regarding International Humanitarian laws (IHL) in Afghanistan and is currently Chief Editor of Nukhost Daily newspaper based in Kabul.

Augustine Anthuvan is a senior TV journalist, voice talent, forum moderator, media literacy facilitator and media trainer from Singapore. Currently working as Editor, International Desk, Channel NewsAsiaMediaCorp Pte Ltd, he also covers socio-political developments across Asia and beyond.

Sabina Kidwai is Associate Professor, Film Editing at Jamia Milia Islamia. In last 20 years she has worked as an editor for a large number of independent documentaries. Sabina has done considerable research work and co-authored two publications, “Illusion of Power” and “Crossing the Sacred Line”, on the subject of women and political participation. She has done a study on the “Images of Muslim Women” for wiscomp (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace), produced under the “Scholar for Peace” Fellowship.

Bharat Bhushan is a senior Indian journalist. He was the founding editor of Mail Today. Earlier, he was the Executive Editor of the Hindustan Times, editor of The Telegraph in Delhi, editor of the Express News Service and the Washington correspondent of The Indian Express.

Peter Cave retired as Foreign Affairs Editor for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in July 2012. In his career with the ABC he has reported on the end of apartheid in South Africa, the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and wars in Slovenia, the 2011 Libyan
civil war and the uprising in Syria among many others. Peter Cave has won six Walkley Awards, Australian journalism’s most prestigious accolade. In 2012 he was given the Special Walkley Award for Outstanding Contribution to Australian Journalism.

Mohammad Sharif Hassanyar started his career with the Moby media group as reporter and is currently the news operation Manager for TOLO TV and TOLO NEWS. He is one of the emerging editors of Afghanistan who is well travelled and has reported on US elections and other international conferences.

Malinda Seneviratne is a Sri Lankan nationalist activist, writer, poet and journalist. Known for his strong political views, Malinda Seneviratne is currently the Editor-in-Chief of The Nation. His formal training was in Sociology. He completed his Bachelor’s degree at Harvard University, and all coursework for a PhD from Cornell University, before deciding he had had enough of school.

Prashant Aryal has served as Editor-in-Chief of Nepal Magazine, a Nepali weekly magazine. With a career spanning over two decades, Prashant Aryal is one of the longest serving journalists of Nepal. Beginning his career in 1992 as a Reporter for a weekly, Prashant has worked for the national daily Kantipur, as well as for Space Time daily and Himal Khabarpatrika. He was awarded the Transparency International Journalism Prize in 1998.

Rahimullah Khan Yusufzai is the Resident/Executive Editor of the Jang Group’s The NEWS International at the Peshawar bureau and is an op-ed writer for the monthly Newsline. He is especially noted for holding the last interview with Osama bin Laden. Acknowledging his achievements in journalism, the government of Pakistan awarded him with Tamgha-e-Imtiaz in August 2004 and Sitara-e-Imtiaz in August 2009, and then again in 2010, both times for his achievements in the field of journalism.
Naem Nizam is the Editor of *Bangladesh Pratidin*, a Bangla-language daily which has the highest circulation in the country. With over two decades of experience in print and broadcast media, he is regarded as an influential thought leader in Bangladeshi civil society. Nizam had started his career as a reporter at daily *Ajker Kagoj* in 1990, and continued to serve in different newspapers, news agencies and TV stations for 27 years.

Madhuker Upadhyay is a seasoned journalist and veteran media person, and a member of the Editors Guild of India. He was associated with the BBC Hindi Services in London since 1990 and has also been Editor of *PTI Bhasha*. Considered as one of the leading Hindi scholars, he has published ten books in English and Hindi. Some of his books have been translated into other Indian languages

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Emad Abshenass is a Senior Editor from Iran who started his career in 1985 with IRNA. Currently the Manager-in-Charge and Editor-in-Chief of Iran Daily newspaper (that belongs to the IRNA). He is also Manager-in-Charge and Editor-in-Chief of Sefroyek, a Persian biweekly magazine and TorshoShirin, a Persian monthly magazine.

Rinzing Wangchuk is one of the seniormost working journalists in Bhutan. As Editor of Kuensel, Bhutan's national language newspaper, Rinzing Wangchuk has been writing and contributing stories on crime, corruption and investigative issues in both English and Dzongkha editions. He assumed the post of Dzongkha Editor in January 2006 after working as a Deputy Editor for five years. He is also the General Secretary for the local chapter of the South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA), the largest network of mainstream media practitioners of the eight South Asian countries.

Hassan Ziyau is Senior Editor and TV Host at Maldives Broadcasting Corporation. He began his journalistic career in 2004 at Television Maldives. Ziyau is a well known name and a famous face in the Maldives. He is known for his TV presentations and his prime time talk show ‘Raajje Miadhu’ (translated as Maldives Today) which airs on weekdays on Television Maldives. He has also participated and represented the Maldives at numerous international conferences, trainings and experience programmes over the years.

Kamal Siddiqi is Editor The Express Tribune, a national English language daily affiliated with the International Herald Tribune. He has 25 years of experience in journalism, and has in the past been affiliated with other leading media houses including Dawn and the Jang Group. Previously he taught journalism at Monash University (Australia) and is currently a Visiting Lecturer at the Karachi University’s journalism department.
PRAKASH RIMAL began his career as a journalist in 1988 with SPARK, a monthly English social magazine; and with news writing and editing in particular which has been his passion ever since. In his long and active career, he had the opportunity to work with Nepal’s key media organisations – Gorkhapatra Corporation, the Kantipur Group, apca/imn and the Space Time Group and is currently the Deputy Editor with The Himalayan Times.

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