

PRESS FOUNDATION OF ASIA

Few institutions have been as important in the political evolution of modern Asia as the daily newspaper. Linking far-flung readers to intellectuals and leaders in regional capitals during the imperial era, Asia's pioneering newspapers fostered nationalism and helped mobilize people for independence struggles in India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and other colonies. In Japan they fanned the flames of expansive patriotism in the years before World War II, while in China they gave voice to revolutionary aspirations and carried the partisan visions of Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek, harnessing millions to one side or the other.

Even so, Asia's newspaper industry was still in a state of infancy by the 1960s, by which time the great issues of nationalism and revolution had largely been settled and Asians went about adjusting to the quotidian problems of life as citizens of the region's new and imperfect nation states.

Although by this time Japan boasted a highly developed system of mass communication and the widest circulating newspaper in Asia (the morning *Asahi Shimbun* reached over five million readers), elsewhere in Asia newspaper circulation was low—only forty copies per one thousand persons; only Africa was lower. High rates of illiteracy, political instability, inadequate and antiquated facilities, and the lack of trained personnel had all hampered the growth of Asia's newspapers. A variety of other difficulties inherent in the demography and social structure of the region also vexed the industry. Consider the extraordinary linguistic diversity of India, for example, where in 1968 newspapers appeared in seventeen languages; even in tiny Malaysia (of no more than fifteen million souls) printed matter was published in eight languages. Moreover, in the vast majority of Asia's new states, the fledgling press was hemmed in, if not completely controlled by domineering governments. As for the product, it was generally ill-printed and provided only superficial and often highly biased accounts of the news, dwelling excessively on politics, scandal, "society," and crime.

Moreover, because of the high cost of newsprint and other imported materials essential to the industry, Asia's newspapers were expensive.

Relative to the income of prospective buyers, the price of a daily newspaper in Calcutta, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, or Manila was four to six times higher than a newspaper in New York or London. If a village school teacher in Bengal were to purchase a newspaper daily for one year, the cost would consume fully one month's worth of his annual earnings! It was nearly the same for Thais and Filipinos.

Yet, despite these difficulties, as Amitabha Chowdhury—the prime mover in founding the PRESS FOUNDATION OF ASIA—pointed out, a great opportunity awaited Asia's newspapers. Asia's press, he wrote, "is poised almost exactly as the Western press was about the middle of the nineteenth century—all the forces of modernization, social change, immense advances in education, and economic development working at it, demanding that newspapers now conquer a multimillion-reader audience."

And, although the majority of Asia's citizens were still poor—too poor to buy a newspaper—the number of Asians achieving prosperity was growing rapidly. Moreover, they were *spending*, judging at least by rising demand for wristwatches, fountain pens, transistor radios, electric fans, and sewing machines. But not newspapers. Why, Chowdhury wondered, has newspaper circulation not kept pace with rising consumer spending?

By the early 1960s, the International Press Institute (IPI) had established its Asian Programme, in part to address questions such as this one, and others relating to professionalism and integrity in Asian journalism. Appointed to be its first director was Abhaya Gamini Perera "Tarzie" Vittachi, former crusading editor of the *Ceylon Observer* and author of *Emergency '58*, which had probed the underlying causes of the bloody communal riots of that year. From ad hoc headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, he worked to encourage the creation of national press institutes in the region to act both as service centers for journalists and as press watchdogs. Through them, the IPI hoped to promote professional excellence and ethics in the media. Two such institutes were in fact set up under Vittachi—the Philippine Press Institute and the Press Institute of India, each funded largely by local publishers but with supplemental funding from external contributors such as the Asia Foundation.

In 1964 Amitabha Chowdhury took over the IPI-Asian Programme directorship. Like Vittachi, he came from a newspaper background. As assistant editor of the Bengali-language *Jugantar* of Calcutta, he had gained renown for exposing government graft and maladministration in hard-hitting but impeccably researched columns (signed "Mr. Impartial"). Chowdhury shared with Vittachi another distinction: both

had been among the earliest recipients of the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism—Vittachi in 1959, Chowdhury in 1961. By 1964, Chowdhury's chronic battles with his publisher over *Jugantar's* position on the rights of Muslim minorities in Hindu-dominated Bengal (and other issues) had left him, he says, "bruised and exhausted." Vittachi personally tapped him for the IPI-Asian Programme directorship. Chowdhury moved the IPI-Asian Programme head office from Kuala Lumpur to Manila, where he had personal friends and willing helpmates at the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation (RMAF).

From his new base in Manila, Chowdhury carried on Vittachi's work, organizing training programs for journalists and publishers and aiding in the establishment of national press institutes. Five came into being under his guidance: the Korean Press Institute; the Southeast Asian Press Center, which later became the Malaysian Press Institute; the Press Foundation of Thailand, which is now the Press Development Institute of Thailand; the Press Foundation of Indonesia; and the Chinese Language Press Institute. These were important tasks, the goals of which he enthusiastically supported. But certain things about the International Press Institute troubled Chowdhury. The IPI was headquartered in Europe and funded wholly from Western sources; both organizationally and spiritually its Asian Programme was an outpost of a Western organization, whose relationship to the main organization he likened to that of a "younger brother to an elder brother."

The Asian Programme's subordinate relationship to the IPI was a particularly sensitive issue, since many of the region's intelligentsias—including many in the press— inveighed daily against foreign influence of all kinds. Newspaper columns of this sort were rife in the Philippines at the time, for example, and commonplace in India. IPI's dependency on Western funding and guidance made it vulnerable to such attacks. Why not establish a regionwide press organization that was truly rooted in Asia, Chowdhury wondered, guided and in large measure funded by the region's own publishers and editors? He approached IPI with the idea of making IPI-Asian Programme autonomous, with its own board of directors and separate funding. The IPI was not receptive and, in June 1968, Chowdhury informed the organization that he would not be renewing his contract. Meanwhile, he had already set in motion his plan for a fully Asian press association.

Through the IPI, Chowdhury had organized, beginning in 1967, a series of large meetings called Asian Newspapers Conference, wherein gathered Asia's leading publishers and editors to discuss the many vexing problems of their industry—among them, the urgent need for a local source of newsprint. The first of these convened in Kandy, Sri Lanka, in March 1967. It was hosted by the Lakehouse Group of Ceylon

and its chief, Esmond Wickremesinghe, and attended by 120 delegates representing some of the most influential publishing companies in Asia. At the conference, Chowdhury issued a manifesto outlining four goals for the industry: (1) to reduce the cost of newspapers and bring the “daily printed word” within reach of every literate household; (2) to create within Asia an abundant supply of newsprint; (3) to replace Asia’s largely antiquated lead-type printing presses with offset printing technology; and (4) to create newspapers that are “responsible, bright, and relevant” and thereby protect the concept of press freedom. (After all, Chowdhury pointed out, if you do not build a constituency among the people, who will clamor for you if the government clamps down?)

The Asian Newspaper Conference delegates discussed Chowdhury’s manifesto at length, with an eye to establishing a regionwide institute to aid the industry in achieving its objectives. Then, as the conference drew to a close, Chowdhury attempted to tap the general enthusiasm by asking for money; he hoped, he told them, to raise an endowment fund of some U.S.\$500,000 in Asia. Although at first no one responded, Koh Jai Wook, president and editor-in-chief of Seoul, Korea’s *Dong-A Ilbo*, soon rose and committed himself on-the-spot to a contribution of U.S.\$50,000. This got the ball rolling and several others made large pledges, among them: A. C. (Bill) Simmons of the *Straits Times*, Singapore; Esmond Wickremesinghe; and Joaquin “Chino” Roces, publisher of the *Manila Times* of the Philippines. Roces, in addition, agreed to host (and fund) a follow-up conference in Manila later the same year.

To this larger conference Chowdhury invited representatives of the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations and five United Nations agencies to attend as observers. The delegates determined to headquarter their new organization in Manila, established a committee structure, and set to work drafting a constitution—subsequently refined by Philippine lawyer Sedfrey Ordoñez, who also drafted the by-laws, articles of association, and charter. These tasks were virtually complete when the third and final Asian Newspapers Conference convened in Seoul, Korea, the following April. The organization adopted, at the suggestion of Esmond Wickremesinghe, the name PRESS FOUNDATION OF ASIA. Meanwhile, Joaquin Roces successfully lobbied for an Act of Congress that established the Foundation as a legal nonprofit entity in the Philippines and granted it tax exemption and related diplomatic privileges.

An interesting feature of the new FOUNDATION’s structure was that it possessed two separate boards. On one hand, the trustees were construed to form a more-or-less permanent body whose function was to support and advise the organization financially; they composed the organization’s founding fathers. The directors, on the other hand, were

elected by the general run of the membership and represented its press interests. In practice, membership of the two boards was virtually identical in the beginning, and over the years they have tended to meet simultaneously. Among the early directors and trustees were Esmond Wickremesinghe, Joaquin P. Roces, Koh Jai Wook, A.C. Simmons, G. Narasimhan, Sally Aw Sian, and Adrian Zecha of Hong Kong, Naoji Yorozu and Susumu Ejiri of Japan, and Indonesia's Mochtar Lubis.

Lubis, another Magsaysay awardee in journalism (1958), had spent several of the late Sukarno years in Indonesia under detention—a victim of Sukarno's crackdown on independent news reporting—and had been released in late 1965. Don Ramon Roces (the brother of Joaquin), one of Lubis's many Filipino admirers, had donated an eight-unit rotary printing press to help resurrect his crusading newspaper, *Indonesia Raya*. Chowdhury, acting partly under the auspices of the IPI-Asian Programme and partly on behalf of the fledgling PRESS FOUNDATION OF ASIA, raised money to ship the equipment to Jakarta. In 1968 Lubis made a triumphant visit to Manila where he was greeted like a hero by his friends in the press and received by President Ferdinand Marcos. Chowdhury took the opportunity to "draft him into the PFA."

As chief executive of the neophyte FOUNDATION, Chowdhury could boast of a growing endowment—subsequent contributions from Eugenio Lopez (publisher of the *Manila Chronicle*) and from donors in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea swelled the fund to nearly \$500,000, just as he had hoped—but day-to-day operating funds were scarce. Having now severed relations with the IPI, Chowdhury shared an office with the RMAF and otherwise kept his organization going by drawing upon his severance pay and personal savings and cajoling key staff assistants to continue working even though their salaries were delayed. Meanwhile, he looked for new sources of support. While on a trip to New York he called upon John D. Rockefeller III, whom he had met briefly in Manila sometime earlier. Rockefeller listened attentively to his predicament and, as the meeting drew to a close, indicated that he would try to help out. A check soon arrived from the JDR III Fund, signed personally by Mr. Rockefeller. It was made out for \$25,000. With this modest windfall in hand, Chowdhury recruited Tarzie Vittachi (then running World Forum Features in London) to join PFA as joint chief executive. Vittachi moved to Manila and, working as a team, he and Chowdhury launched the organization.

The earliest work of the PFA involved pursuing solutions to some of the practical problems of the industry that had been broached in the Kandy, Manila, and Seoul meetings—newsprint production, technology transfer, marketing, and product quality. In Singapore the FOUNDATION helped to establish a printing institute to explore and test

new printing techniques and to search for other means of making small- and medium-sized newspapers economically viable. At the same time, directors of the affiliated national press institutes were constituted as a working committee of the PFA, informally known as the Baguio Group. It was their task to coordinate the work and resources of the various institutes and, as Chowdhury puts it, “to guide its work from below.”

After several meetings, the Baguio Group devised a three-year plan that, among other things, addressed the acute need for in-service training for journalists. This was a need that the FOUNDATION could meet, and quickly. Its first in-service training course, conducted in July and August 1968 in New Delhi, Calcutta, Colombo, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Cebu, was titled “Asian Photographers’ Training Workshop” and led by Eric Hale, photo consultant of the Thomson Foundation. This was followed by a second round of seminars in Manila on economic writing and the prospects for regionalism in Asia. Workshops like these soon became a mainstay of the PFA’s work. The following year PFA organized eight separate trainings on topics ranging from newspaper management, cost control, and printing to reporting on agriculture, science, economics, and women’s issues; these were held in Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Singapore, and the Philippines.

To aid in this work, Chowdhury and Vittachi hired veteran Filipino journalist Juan “Johnny” L. Mercado, who had earned his stripes as a newspaper reporter with Manila’s *Evening News* and the Philippine News Service and who had subsequently been tapped to head the Philippine Press Institute. Mercado was a brilliant editor and writer gifted with the human touch. He possessed a keen interest in development issues such as population. Mercado now became deputy chief executive of PRESS FOUNDATION OF ASIA, while continuing to guide the PPI and to write regularly for the Manila newspapers.

The Rockefeller grant dwindled quickly and Chowdhury and his partners were soon hard-put to raise additional funds. Chowdhury, Vittachi, and Mochtar Lubis toured the United States knocking on foundation doors and attempting to raise money from friends in the North American publishing industry. (In the early 1960s, during a one-and-a-half-year stint as a Ford Foundation Fellow, Chowdhury had met editors and publishers of several American dailies.) Paring their expenses to a bare minimum, the three lodged in the cheapest hotels and, when completely bereft of cash, resorted to a gold credit card that Chowdhury had been given by the executive vice-president of Bankers Trust, where a portion of PFA’s endowment was deposited. This round of fundraising yielded little, and back in Manila Chowdhury now prepared to send his family back to India and to cut the staff to a

bare minimum. Meanwhile, he and Johnny Mercado finished a crucial grant application for the Ford Foundation.

One of the key concepts enunciated in the manifesto that had launched the PFA was *relevance*. The region's newspapers were full of news about national leaders and politicians ("The prime minister said such-and-such today. . . .") and of reams of trivia about celebrities, socialites, crime, scandal, and sports. But very few of them addressed with any degree of depth or intelligence the revolutionary social and economic changes that were overtaking the daily lives of virtually all Asians. What were the consequences, for example, of the many Development Plans being executed by Asia's governments? How were ordinary people being affected by rapid industrialization, urbanization, and population growth? Tarzie Vittachi captured the central problem when he wrote: "When five people die of starvation in a certain village in an Asian country, newspapers report it as an *event*. But when tens of thousands of people go through slow starvation and widespread malnutrition for months or even years, it is a *process* that seldom gets covered." Why not, Chowdhury asked, devote the PFA to sensitizing Asian reporters to the *process* and "send them out to look for a news beat which will be focused on the economic and social changes that are taking place in Asia?"

Chowdhury developed this theme in a sixteen-page prospectus for the Ford Foundation and asked Mercado to provide six sample stories to illustrate the concept. Vittachi provided an introduction. By the time the financial estimates were added, the proposal was a hefty eighty pages. It envisioned a two-year program of seminars for Asia's senior news editors (to introduce them to both "the message and the model") and the creation of a news feature service to provide model stories for the region's press: "**D**evelopment **E**conomic and **P**opulation **T**hemes **N**ews," or "DEPTHnews."

Chowdhury was soon meeting with George Grant, a senior Ford Foundation representative in Rome, who surprised him by suggesting that he expand the proposal. The PFA's original request was for \$120,000, but Grant suggested that if appropriately enlarged, the Ford Foundation might be willing to fund such a program for three years and to the tune of maybe half a million dollars. Grant told Chowdhury that he and others at the Ford Foundation had been looking for a way to "harness the power and the resources of the print media to the process of development, with an emphasis on population. . . ." He immediately provided an emergency advance of \$65,000 to keep the PFA afloat pending final approval of the expanded proposal—which eventually yielded a grant of \$380,000.

George Grant complained, however, that there did not seem to be a single term or phrase that captured the spirit of the proposal. The two men discussed this problem for awhile and decided that the whole range of issues addressed by PFA's proposal fell under the rubric of Development—the all-encompassing watchword of the post-World War II era. So why not “development journalism?”

The following year, Ford-sponsored seminars on “development journalism” were added to PFA's program. These went on side-by-side with a wide range of others with more specific focuses: science, agriculture, ethnic tensions, business reporting, and topics such as “Generation Gap and the Press.” To establish *Depthnews*, the PFA brought in veteran British journalist and Asia-hand Alan B. Chalkley to serve as chief editor; Johnny Mercado became his deputy. Together they inaugurated the new service with feature stories on miracle rice and the “super” eggplant. Initially *Depthnews* stories were distributed free to PFA's members.

Meanwhile, Tarzie Vittachi left PFA to establish *The Asian*, a new Asia-wide weekly newspaper to be published in Hong Kong. *The Asian* had been conceptualized in the PFA offices and was designed to draw on *Depthnews* reporting and to be distributed weekly through PFA's network of publishing companies; many of PFA's financial backers also backed Vittachi's new venture. Vittachi attracted some of Asia's best editors and reporters and launched the innovative project in 1971. (Alas, advertising revenues failed to materialize and *The Asian* was forced to close in a year's time. “Asia,” concluded Vittachi, “was not ready for such a newspaper.”)

By the early seventies the PFA was well established, with a hefty endowment in the bank and several successful programs up and running. In three years' time 250 newsmen had been trained as “Asia's first corps of development journalists.” Financially, however, the organization was still struggling. Interest income from the endowment was scanty and funds from the Ford Foundation windfall were dedicated to specific programs and were, in any case, provided for a limited period of time. Chowdhury and his team therefore continued to search for other relevant sources of income. A key element in development news was, of course, population. As it happens, the man serving as executive director of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) at the time was a Filipino executive, Rafael Salas, known personally to them and familiar with PFA's philosophy and activities. Chowdhury decided to approach Salas with a proposal similar to the one that had triumphed at the Ford Foundation, only this time tailored to meet the specific objectives of the UNFPA.

Chowdhury traveled to United Nations headquarters in New York to present his modest proposal for a \$120,000 grant to Salas. Salas immediately saw the potential of PFA-style training and Depthnews for advancing popular knowledge on the population issue in Asia. He astonished Chowdhury by suggesting that his organization would be interested in sponsoring PFA programs, but only if the organization could absorb \$2 million dollars in a period of, say, three years. Chowdhury called Johnny Mercado to New York and assembled an ad hoc staff from among friends in the area. Working on rented typewriters in a rented room, they crafted a new and vastly more ambitious proposal. Its success brought an un hoped-for level of largesse to the FOUNDATION and led to a brief period of remarkable florescence and expansion.

Chowdhury now brought in a team of sixteen professional consultants to “take over my conceptions and ideas and give them final, detailed shape.” Many of them were posted to the FOUNDATION’s affiliated national press institutes; the others joined the team in Manila. Overflowing its offices on the tenth floor of a new Manila office building, the FOUNDATION moved into a bungalow nearby and eventually purchased a 1,000-square-meter compound of its own. Depthnews introduced several national editions and attempted to establish itself on a commercial basis—selling its *Depthnews Asia* features to the region’s larger papers but still offering its services free to smaller newspapers.

In a spin-off, Depthnews also offered two completely new services. Regional Reference Service (RRS) “clipped and monitored every available newspaper, learned journal, and central bank bulletin” to create the first databank covering the whole of Asia; and *Data Asia* condensed the RRS data into sixteen-page weekly reports that were compiled annually with an efficient cross-referencing system based on Keesing’s Contemporary Archives of Britain. *Datafil*, introduced by PFA in 1974, was a fifty-page fortnightly providing Philippine data on trade, finance, investments, industry, consumer markets, and public and corporate affairs. Aside from the Depthnews-RRS-*Data Asia*-*Datafil* publications, the UNFPA-funded consultants brought forth two other new PFA “products,” as Chowdhury calls them. The magazine *Media* addressed the interests and needs of the region’s communications industry and the *Asian Press and Media Directory* (APMD) listed all newspapers and magazines, giving their officers, advertising firms, and balance sheets. These new publications and services represented the FOUNDATION’s attempt to fund its ongoing activities through commercially profitable ventures, thus lessening the organization’s dependency on grants.

During this period of prolific expansion, the PFA also developed its Advanced Course on Population and Development Reporting. This UNFPA-funded course, launched in Bangkok in 1973, was designed by

Professor Robi Chakravorti of California State University in consultation with leading social scientists and editors. Twelve weeks long, it was essentially an interdisciplinary crash course on modern development economics, sociology, demography, and statistics integrated with writing exercises and media analysis. In a typical unit on, say, urbanization, lecturers would introduce the fields of urban sociology and planning; this would be followed by an analysis of a case study based on a particular city, after which the participants would write feature articles on case studies of their own. To conclude the unit, participants were asked to analyze critically newspaper coverage of urbanization issues in a selected city.

This training format stood the test of time and the PFA offered a dozen such courses over the next ten years, although in time the Advanced Course had to be shortened because editors found it difficult to spare their reporters for a full twelve weeks. In tandem with the Advanced Course, the PFA organized national workshops tailored to the needs of journalists working in the vernacular and bilingual press of a particular country—mini-courses that offered succinct, comprehensive introductions to the implications of rapid population growth. Depthnews provided useful background materials for PFA's courses and, on occasion, published the work of trainees.

Unfortunately, the PFA's early 1970s expansion into multiple interlocking projects and commercial ventures did not lead to a period of institutional stability and prosperity, as Chowdhury had so fervently hoped. Indeed, a crisis of multiple dimensions was looming. For one thing, the FOUNDATION's belief in principled, honest reporting came increasingly under attack in countries throughout the region, placing some of its stalwart supporters in jeopardy. A harbinger of things to come occurred in 1971 when Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew revoked the *Singapore Herald's* license to print. (Sally Aw Sian of Hong Kong was a *Herald* shareholder and a PFA director.) A PFA delegation composed of Chowdhury and Chino Roces met personally with Lee to lodge a protest. "That meeting was disastrous," says Chowdhury. "Instead of listening to us, or giving any chance to us, before even having a conversation, he lectured us. Then I opened my mouth and blasted him." As Chowdhury acknowledges, "Nobody blasted Lee Kuan Yew face-to-face like this." The PFA paid a heavy price. Lee blackballed the FOUNDATION in Singapore and confiscated the \$150,000 endowment fund contributed by the *Straits Times* and deposited in Singapore.

During the same period in South Korea, the government of Park Chung-hee used the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) to monitor and harass the independent press. The PFA's key affiliate and leading Korean newspaper, the *Dong-A Ilbo*, was repeatedly targeted. In

1971 when it published two editorials mildly critical of the declaration of a state of national emergency, its publisher, Kim Sang-man, was detained and interrogated for four hours and subsequently forced to dismiss his editor-in-chief and managing director. In 1974-75 the Park government turned on the FOUNDATION itself, singling out its members and affiliates for harassment and forbidding its Korean directors to travel abroad for PFA meetings.

Nineteen seventy-two brought martial law to the Philippines. Ferdinand Marcos suppressed all publications other than those he could control directly. Among his primary targets were newspapers published by PFA stalwarts Chino Roces and Eugenio Lopez, Jr. Roces and PFA's Johnny Mercado were imprisoned at the outset of martial law and released only after a vigorous protest campaign orchestrated partly by the FOUNDATION. Lopez was also arrested; all attempts to win his release failed, however, and he remained in custody until 1977, when he escaped. In Indonesia, Mochtar Lubis was arrested by the Suharto government in 1975 in connection with his newspaper's coverage of demonstrations and riots the previous year. He was released after two months following PFA remonstrations, but *Indonesia Raya*, which he had resurrected in 1968, continued to be banned and never reappeared. Indira Gandhi's Emergency in India from 1975 to 1977 suppressed independent journalists and swept many into jail. "All our activities, all our people were blacklisted in India," says Chowdhury; C. G. K. Reddy, a trustee, was jailed.

And so it went throughout Asia as nearly everywhere the news media was coerced to support government, or else. Now, wrote Chowdhury at the time, "almost the entire continent is thus covered by a sad taxonomy of the various types of the disciplined press looking up to a smiling or stoic Big Brother."

The catastrophe was not wholly political. The rising cost of fuel, lubrication, and energy in the early 1970s created a financial crisis for many of the region's newspapers, which became thinner and more expensive: many small- and medium-sized papers disappeared altogether. (In Hong Kong, some thirty-six newspapers closed down in 1973 alone.) As a result, fewer and fewer people could avail themselves of a daily newspaper, and diffusion rates dropped. Central to this crisis was the still-unsolved problem of newsprint, which remained scarce and expensive; moreover, the supply of newsprint in many countries was carefully controlled by government, a fact that reinforced the unhappy dependency of the industry upon people in power.

For its part, the PFA continued to explore alternative sources of precious newsprint. Lacking a breakthrough, however, it used its

influence to emphasize a fairer distribution of newsprint. Writing in *Media Asia*, Chanchal Sarkar, head of the Press Institute of India, calculated that if the world's affluent countries (including Japan) reduced their newsprint consumption by only 4.6 percent, the savings would supply the needs of virtually all South and Southeast Asia plus Taiwan and South Korea. In 1974 the FOUNDATION appealed to UNESCO for help, noting that even as the supply of newsprint in the West was rising dramatically, the supply available to Asia was dwindling.

By the mid-1970s this political and financial crisis was at its peak. "Morale of the senior editors of Asia," wrote Chowdhury in 1976, "has never been so low."

This depressing state of affairs also undermined the good efforts of the PFA's affiliate press institutes, whose leadership had been decimated or muted in the various political repressions and many of whose programs were now moribund. By 1976, trainings and other press professionalization efforts in Asia had largely disappeared. Moreover, the PFA itself was also caught in the destructive downward spiral.

The FOUNDATION's large grant from the UNFPA sustained it for several years, but it was a boon that it could not realistically hope to garner a second time. Chowdhury had used the money to develop a range of commercially viable products that, he hoped, would fund PFA's core activities indefinitely. But these new undertakings did not flourish. Asia was locked in a depression and the times did not smile on new ventures. Even *Depthnews Asia*, whose commercial subscribers included regional heavy-hitters like the *Bangkok Post*, *Hongkong Standard*, *The Star* (Malaysia), and the new *Asian Wall Street Journal*, had to be subsidized to the tune of about \$50,000 a year. Moreover, the FOUNDATION's endowment also atrophied badly. Loss of the Singapore deposits was accompanied by the beginnings of a prolonged financial decline in the Philippines. In order to take advantage of higher interest rates, the FOUNDATION had deposited a sizable portion of its endowment fund in a Philippine investment company, Bancom. Market declines and the devaluation of the Philippine peso early in the seventies decimated the Philippine component, and a market and bank crash at mid-decade, says Chowdhury, "wiped it out completely." Of the original \$500,000, only about \$120,000 now remained.

Meanwhile, debts were mounting. As the financial crisis deepened, the FOUNDATION's directors and trustees moved to stave off disaster. To settle PFA's debts and rebuild the endowment, they sold off *Datafil*, Regional Reference Service (which was renamed Asia Reference Services, ARS, by its new owners), and *Media*. Eventually, even PFA's

office compound in Manila was sold. "All this absolutely broke my heart," says Chowdhury, who thought the sell-off precipitous and advised holding out for better times. By this time, however, Chowdhury himself had relinquished his post as chief executive to launch *Asian Finance*, a new Asia-wide magazine based in Hong Kong and backed by his friends in the Manila publishing industry and Bancom.

From Hong Kong, Amitabha Chowdhury remained active in PFA affairs as executive trustee. In Manila, however, a new team was taking hold. S. M. Ali, a Bangladeshi journalist and former managing editor of the *Bangkok Post*, replaced Chowdhury as chief executive in 1978. By this time other members of the original team had also departed. When Alan Chalkley left Manila for Hong Kong (where he joined Vittachi's ill-fated *The Asian*), Johnny Mercado replaced him as chief editor of *Depthnews*. Subsequently, in 1975, Mercado himself resigned and relocated in Bangkok, where he took up a post as a communications officer with the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Manolo Jara took Mercado's place directing *Depthnews Asia* and remained in this post until his retirement in 1989. Another key addition was Romeo Abundo. For several years, Abundo had been general manager of Philippine News Service. When this agency was taken over "lock, stock, and barrel" by the Marcos martial law government in 1972, Abundo joined PFA as editor of *Depthnews Philippines*. In 1978 he rose to become PFA's joint chief executive and served side-by-side with S. M. Ali.

Although depleted, the organization that Ali and Abundo now headed was still substantial. Some eighty people were on the payroll, including predominantly the team of journalists (many of them former editors, bureau chiefs, and correspondents) in the pan-Asian *Depthnews* network, which Ali called "by far the most innovative and most professional that one can find in Asia." Aside from its headquarters in Manila, the FOUNDATION maintained offices in Hong Kong, Tokyo, Bangkok, and Kuala Lumpur and served some three hundred member-newspapers. Moreover, it continued to support and collaborate with the region's national press institutes and the Chinese Language Press Institute of Hong Kong. PFA's training program had dwindled almost to a standstill in the mid-1970s. In 1975 there were no seminars at all, and only one each in the following two years. Through effective advocacy with supporting UN agencies and other funding sources, Ali and Abundo managed to revive the program, expanding it to three trainings in 1978 and a full ten in 1979. They also launched an effective series of "briefings" on development issues for senior news executives too busy to attend the regular courses and orchestrated a series of "encounters" between news editors and informed opinionists from key sectors outside media (i.e., labor, women, education, health).

After the mid-seventies the FOUNDATION was a decidedly less ambitious organization. Its early initiatives in newsprint production and printing technology, for example, had never really taken off and, by this time, had long since been quietly abandoned.

In 1979, S. M. Ali resigned from the PFA to join UNESCO, after which Romeo Abundo remained as editorial director in Manila. Mochtar Lubis became director general. Serving on a non-salaried, part-time basis, Lubis now became the PFA's ambassador and guiding spirit, visiting the Manila offices several times a year from his home in Jakarta and representing the PFA in international gatherings. Abundo, meanwhile, "minded the store" in Manila, handling editorial matters and serving as administrative officer for all PFA operations. This collaboration has endured up to 1991. Amitabha Chowdhury credits Mochtar Lubis with PFA's survival during "the dark period" when the organization's very existence seemed to be in jeopardy. "The fact that this tall, laughing man, this always cheerful man was there and stretched out his hands, kept it going. He kept the flame alive." In time, Lubis also succeeded in bringing in some new contributions to the endowment; moreover, his stature and reputation lent credibility to PFA proposals when Abundo met with funding agencies.

Depthnews had long since developed as PFA's flagship service. By the time Mochtar Lubis assumed the position of director general, Depthnews was coming out every week in ten separate editions. There was the standard English-language edition for the region, called *Depthnews Asia*, plus *Depthnews India* in English and Hindi; *Depthnews Indonesia* in Bahasa Indonesia; *Depthnews Thailand* in Thai; and *Depthnews Philippines* in English and Tagalog. These multilingual editions circulated in twelve Asian countries. *Depthnews Philippines*, the largest edition, had an estimated circulation of 1.4 million by virtue of the large number of English and vernacular-language publications that carried its features throughout the Philippines. In addition, PFA also published *Depthnews Special* (now *Special Features and Economic Service*), providing sustained in-depth coverage of specific issues and a feature service focusing on science—*Depthnews Science Service*. *Depthnews Women's Feature Service* was added in 1979 and *Depthnews Bangladesh* in 1981.

All these services continue to flourish in 1991. In the Special Features series, for example, PFA now publishes quarterly folios on the environment (funded by the United Nations Environment Program—UNEP—and distributed free to environmental organizations and all media organizations in Asia) and a bi-monthly newsletter funded by UNICEF on *Asian Women and Children*. In addition, the FOUNDATION publishes *Press Asia*, its quarterly house organ, and handles publication

of *Integration* an international review of population, family planning, and mother-child issues, published by the Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning.

The development of Depthnews science series illustrates how, even in the midst of its most calamitous years, the PFA discerned a key gap in Asian news reporting and proceeded to fill it. In many ways, successful economic development depended on the appropriate application of science and technology. Yet there was a startling lack of knowledge and awareness in the region concerning science; moreover, most science reporting in Asian newspapers—and there was very little—focused on advances and issues in the West, not in Asia. The FOUNDATION had already conducted three training seminars on science reporting, beginning as early as 1970. It now proposed both to train Asian reporters as science writers and, as an offshoot of Depthnews, to develop and disseminate models of good science writing at the rate of two science features a week. Mack Laing, a Canadian science journalist on leave from the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of Western Ontario, was brought in to head the new enterprise, which was launched in 1976 and funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada. In his inaugural letter to Depthnews subscribers, he wrote, “Science is now so bound up with our lives that a newspaper which ignores it cannot claim to be informing its readership.”

Participants in PFA's earlier science-writing seminars were among the series' first correspondents, and from Manila Laing and his staff encouraged members of the entire Depthnews team to try their hand, coaching them patiently through the mail. “The ugliest of problems,” wrote Laing (and two PFA colleagues, Adlai Amor and Paul Icamina) in a manual for science writers in Asia, “can have the most scientific or technologically beautiful solutions. Rubber tires on bullock carts in India, for example. It is simple. It is possible. The cargo-carrying capacity of the whole country's traditional freight system zooms up. From 750 kilograms, India's bullock carts can now carry as much as three tons—a 400 percent increase!” The *Depthnews Science Service* did not turn out to be economically viable as a separate commercial service, so it was simply integrated into the weekly *Depthnews Asia* packet and the packets of the various national and vernacular language services. Distributed this way, it has become a permanent and valued part of the Depthnews system.

In essence, what a Depthnews subscriber receives each week is a packet of seven or eight stories of about one thousand to two thousand words each. These have been submitted by Depthnews' sixty-five far-flung correspondents and stringers and carefully edited by the staff

in Manila. Comporting still with the original intent of Mercado and Chowdhury, Depthnews stories typically address issues of social change and development that are often overlooked by purveyors of “hard news.”

A sampling from early 1991 gives one a sense of Depthnews’ focus and range. A feature datelined Kathmandu takes up the plight of three thousand people rendered homeless when forest officers set their settlement afire in an attempt to drive them from a forest preserve. The article focuses ultimately on the larger issues of landlessness, poverty-driven migration, and government resettlement schemes. Another, from India, introduces readers to Lakshmi Behan, a poor woman who married against her will and who, through the efforts of India’s Self-Employed Women’s Association, improved her livelihood through dairy farming and rose to head her local women’s milk cooperative; the Depthnews reporter links Lakshmi’s story to issues of rural poverty, vested interests, the status of women, and the successful helping efforts of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Other stories take up the economic plight of government workers in the Philippines, changing roles for women in Malaysia, Asia’s “sidewalk proletariat,” displaced tribal minorities, irrigation, pesticides, and how “Pervasive Poverty Threatens [the] Indonesian Shrimp Industry.” True to Chowdhury’s dictum, these stories address not only the process and consequences of development, they also address “social justice and its relationship to economic growth.”

Today, these articles reach hundreds of thousands of readers on a regular basis through the region’s print media. Through *Depthnews Radio*, however, they reach an estimated fifty-six million! Beginning in 1978, Depthnews began rewriting some of its stories for radio and today three PFA staff members devote themselves to this work. The original stories are shortened and rephrased for broadcasting and then mailed in packets to the region’s major radio broadcasting networks—to be redistributed by them to some six hundred local stations in twenty-three countries. The service is free. Through *Depthnews Radio*, the PFA’s development stories reach farther into Asia than its print outlets can possibly hope to do. Its stories are broadcast in Vietnamese, Kannada, Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, Marathi, Nepali, and Tok Pidgin as well as in English, Bahasa Indonesia, Thai, Tagalog, and other Philippine vernacular languages. They are widely heard in the Pacific Islands where daily newspapers are scarce. Moreover, as Romeo Abundo says, “Think of the Philippines. How many people read the newspapers in the provinces? You could count them. But the small farmer will be listening to his transistor radio and he will get the story.”

As telling the “development story” and professional training came to dominate the work of the FOUNDATION, freedom of the press remained a vexing issue. “You may wonder,” wrote S. M. Ali as PFA’s chief executive, why an organization whose president, former chief executive, several trustees, and “countless individual members in different Asian countries have served prison terms for their commitment to press freedom often tends to adopt a low profile on this issue.” Ali answered by pointing out that the PFA preferred quiet diplomacy between publishers and governments, an approach that “has worked on a number of occasions, [and] has failed in a few others.” Chowdhury agrees with this approach. “Press-freedom mongering, demanding, asking every day,” he says, “the old guard never believed that this was the way to protect press freedom. If you have to operate in Asia, you cannot take that approach or you will be completely banned.” Better to work quietly behind the scenes in specific cases and otherwise work publicly to promote an honorable, responsible, relevant, and bright press. Achieving this, says Chowdhury, “we believe that press freedom will also succeed.”

Even so, in recent years the PFA has decided to take a more vocal stand. Meeting in Karachi in 1987, the joint boards of the FOUNDATION issued a declaration pledging to act as a watchdog for violations in Asia of “the universally accepted norms of press freedom and free expression,” including the arbitrary closure of any newspaper and the arbitrary arrest of journalists and publishers.

Although some of PFA’s endowment fund has been restored in the years since the debacle of the 1970s, the FOUNDATION today continues to fund its day-to-day operations and services through grants from United Nations agencies and other funding sources. For many years the UNFPA “carried” the FOUNDATION, but in recent years it has engaged in projects on behalf of UNEP, UNICEF, UNESCO, IDRC, ESCAP, WHO, and WWF. Up until now, Depthnews is able to break even only because of such subventions. Romeo Abundo comments that the FOUNDATION is now safely “in balance,” but that “there has never been a year when we could enjoy a tremendous surplus in our operations.” He has therefore become adept at matching the Foundation’s strengths to the agendas of potential funders. An example was the establishment in 1988 of the Press Institute of Pakistan. UNESCO officials discerned the need for such an institute and commissioned the PFA to conduct a study. In a twenty-two-day trip to Pakistan, Abundo personally interviewed the country’s press people high and low and urged them to establish an institute to promote professionalism and, eventually, press freedom. On his recommendation, UNESCO provided the seed money for the new organization and for the structural support provided

by PFA. Conceptualizing and fleshing out new roles for the PFA and new programs to submit to relevant United Nations agencies are an important part of Abundo's work. Sometimes, however, he feels as though he has "to go around begging," he says.

PFA training seminars in recent years have concentrated heavily on the issues of child survival, population, and skill-building for development journalism. The FOUNDATION conducted eleven such workshops between 1985 and 1991, including a UNFPA-funded internship on editorial skills for two journalists from China in 1990 and another on "Child Survival and Development" in 1988, attended by forty-four comic book artists. In the same period, however, the FOUNDATION conducted over fifty workshops in collaboration with its national press institute affiliates and other agencies such as IDRC, the Indonesian private news agency Kantor Berita Nasional Indonesia, and the Philippines' Department of Health. Most of these workshops focused on child survival (seventeen) and management and editorial skills (twenty-one). Three, however, in Nepal and New Zealand, addressed population and development, two were on women, and one, conducted in Malaysia in collaboration with the Muslim World League, was titled "Culture and Religion." Many of these collaborative trainings were conducted outside the region's capital cities.

The PFA's formula for professional training, which combines the rigor of the classroom with the working atmosphere of the newsroom, is highly effective. Some of Asia's leading journalists today are among the 1,300 graduates of PFA trainings, including Sutichai Yoon of *The Nation* (Thailand); Wirasak Salayakanond, executive director of the Press Development Institute of Thailand; Rejal Arbee of Malaysia's *Business Week*; and Warief Djajanto, editor of Kantorberita Nasional Indonesia. Zubeida Mustafa of Karachi's *Dawn*, another PFA graduate, was Pakistan's first woman editor.

Although the FOUNDATION's operations today are more modest than those in the heady years of the early 1970s, once again optimism reigns. By the mid-1980s many of the PFA-affiliated victims of political repression in the 1970s had been vindicated by the fall of the regimes they had offended. Some, like Chino Roces in the Philippines and others in India, had become public heroes in the struggle against dictatorship. The mood changed. The region's economy improved. To Chowdhury, it seemed, the time had come to reinvigorate the PFA. He became more active and encouraged Tarzie Vittachi to refresh his ties with the FOUNDATION as well. The directors and trustees began meeting more frequently; efforts were made to recruit younger publishers and editors to play an active role in the FOUNDATION's affairs.

Thinking expansively once again, Chowdhury sought a way to “recharge” the FOUNDATION’s batteries and to claim a higher profile in Asia. In the PFA’s early years, on three occasions it had convened regional congresses of leading publishers, journalists, and opinion makers. These “One-Asia Assemblies,” as they were called, had been held in Manila (1970), Bali (1971), and New Delhi (1973), and then lapsed. Chowdhury and his colleagues now revived the idea. The Fourth One-Asia Assembly convened in Manila in February 1990. President Corazon Aquino delivered the keynote address before a crowd of two thousand. The seminar sessions that followed were attended by some eight hundred participants daily. John Kenneth Galbraith and other distinguished experts addressed the delegates.

To dramatize the reality of “One Asia,” the PFA used satellite communications to execute a live teleconference in which four Asian leaders—Philippine President Corazon Aquino, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad, Korean Prime Minister Kang Young-boon, and Indian Foreign Minister Inder Gujral—dialogued with each other and responded to questions posed by assembly delegates. (Messages from South Korean President Roh Tae Woo and Indian President V. V. Singh were also read, and Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan addressed the assembly in a prerecorded video film.) This was a first.

The 1990 One-Asia Assembly was a U.S.\$600,000 venture whose costs were to be covered by conference fees and sales of banners, pamphlets, books, and, most importantly, television rights. (The teleconference was broadcast in several Asian countries.) Chowdhury had hoped to turn a profit for the PFA’s flagging endowment fund but managed, alas, only to cover the costs of the assembly itself. (One of the contractees, Chowdhury says, wretched on its commitments; he is sure that future One-Asia Assemblies can generate new funds for the endowment.) Nevertheless, the assembly was a “tremendous success” and left the PFA “ready to go places.”

Where will it go? Chowdhury believes that just as the world of media communications is changing rapidly, so too must the PFA. It is his own dream to see the FOUNDATION housed in a new high-tech center that will serve not only as PFA’s home but as “Asia’s finest telecommunications service center.” Although he and Tarzie and Mochtar still hope to be instrumental in building the endowment, they are otherwise ready to step aside. So he is encouraged by the emergence of new, younger leaders within the organization: Aweek Sarkar, editor-in-chief of India’s Anandabazar Group of Publications of Calcutta, is PFA’s president; Mazlan bin Nordin, chairman of Malaysia’s national news agency Bernama, is vice-chairman of the board of directors; Hameed Haroon of Pakistan, publisher of the Dawn Group of Publications, is a

trustee; and Kadir Jasin, group editor of Malaysia's New Straits Times Press and an early graduate of PFA development journalism training, is now a director.

With new blood will come new vitality and new ideas. The PFA, Chowdhury says, must keep pace with the needs of Asia's press industry and media. "The obsolescence rate is very high," he warns. "You must constantly renew your program and your outlook. If the FOUNDATION continues to produce relevant programs, it will remain. If not, it doesn't deserve to remain." The key, he says, is "renew, renew, renew."

September 1991
Manila

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