

Journalism Review

Bhutanese

Journalism Review

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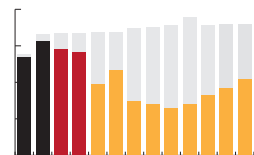
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FOREWORD

The introductory edition of the Bhutanese Journalism Review presented the scenario of Bhutanese media and some facts and figures on the industry.

Starting this edition, we take a closer look at the media. Before anything else, we felt it was important and necessary to nail one question first - Is there journalism in Bhutan?

As Bhutanese media evolves with time and technology, demands on and of journalism change, therefore, the title question is one our society must ask itself time and again.

After a little more than nine years of liberalising the media business, everything about the profession is up for debate and discussion today. News consumers and newsmakers are arguing about the definition of “journalism” and “journalist”.

People all over the world, who do not even belong to a news agency are using social media and smartphones to record, broadcast and comment on ‘news’. Print media are challenged by new business models that are delivering news to mobile audiences.

With this, Bhutan Media Foundation presents the second Bhutanese Journalism Review, delving into how the profession of journalism is perceived and practiced.

Journalism is a fancy term for many of us, but how much of it is pursued in Bhutan?

Is this how our media should work? Will journalism practiced elsewhere work for Bhutan and Bhutanese? Are our media people doing enough? Is it time for a rethink?

We are not teaching or lecturing on how and what journalism should be. We are simply tossing the idea. We all know there are problems and challenges. Individually, we think there are solutions. How realistic are they? Together, we can work out a substantial one.

When we started working on the first issue of the Review more than four months ago, our goal was clear. We wanted a publication that would follow media development closely, while bringing media related subjects and issues on board.

It was received well. Informally, it also stirred up some concerns and generated discussion among media practitioners as to why the publication? Others disagreed with some of the write-ups. If it has provoked thoughts and discussions, if it has made people in the business conscious, then the publication is serving the purpose.

We encourage everyone, within and outside the media fraternity to write to us, share ideas, say whether you agree. Let us discuss the Bhutanese media in totality. We still believe that discourse and discussion is important. That is one important way to come out of the muck media finds itself in today.



DAWA PENJOR
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
BHUTAN MEDIA FOUNDATION

DEAR READER

Welcome to the second edition of the Bhutanese Journalism Review.

The lead article in this edition explores whether there is journalism in Bhutan.

This theme grew from varying comments of the Bhutanese intelligentsia, who at one end of the spectrum, say it is not there and at the other end, believe how it should be.

Here we also talk to editors of local media houses and gather their responses on the theme.

In the “behind the news” section is a profile of a local journalist who has served for the past 25 years and continues to do so. The article provides some insight on how journalism in Bhutan has

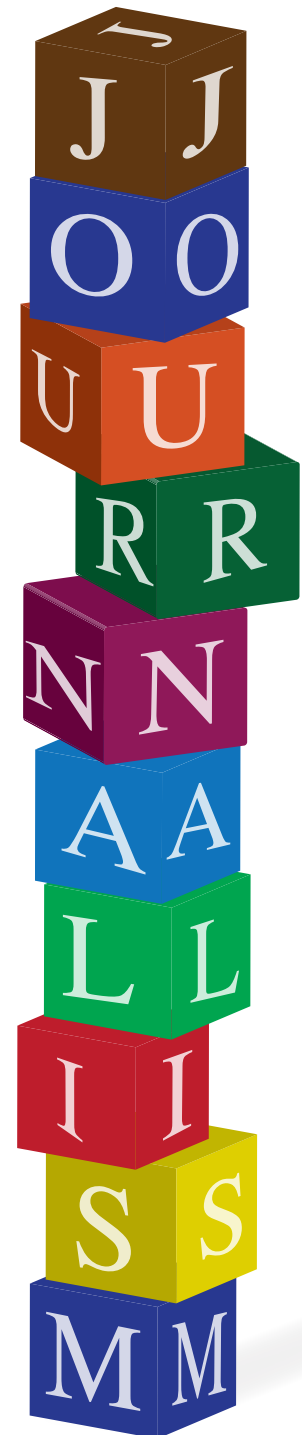
changed over the years.

The monthly section of the magazine looks at published content between January and April and highlights coverage by different media houses on varying issues.

This edition also carries an article on Bhutan’s rankings on the press freedom index inspired by an editorial in a local paper and an article in the Diplomat magazine on the same issue.

The edition also takes a look at hardcopy subscriptions of international news media by readers in Thimphu. As expected, the subscription base has shrunk over the years but the reason why it is so, is much more than just Internet penetration.

Happy reading!





Dear ed,

After going through the first issue of the Review, I got to know a lot about other media houses.

While the first issue was about the overall media scenario in Bhutan, it doesn't reflect in depth the day to day challenges we in private media face. It starts from deprivation of basic logistics like internet, telephone, camera and a recorder.

For the next edition, I suggest BMF bring views from government officials and other organisations on how they see the private media and state owned media.

Dechen Dolkar
The Journalist

Dear ed,

A publication that seeks to analyse, investigate and study the media scenario in the country was long overdue. Although the first issue had broad and general overview of the several challenges facing the media, the objective hence can also be about iden-

tifying common mistakes and providing helpful tips.

I think it is important we have a thorough understanding of the media, its strengths and weaknesses and the objectives in terms of what media is intended toward.

Your first issue highlighted the fact that journalists working for various media houses were ill equipped and poorly trained. What kind of changes should there be so we can advocate professionalism and competence?

However, the magazine seems to focus more on the print media and has left out television, especially under your content analysis section. Can we expect some analysis on contents of television and radio in the coming issues?

Nidup Gyeltshen
BBS

Dear ed,

This publication is a very thoughtful initiative from BMF. Until now, while we are

working for different media houses, Bhutanese Journalism Review is one publication for all the media people to come together. Keep up the great work.

Chencho Zam
Bhutan Today

Dear ed,

The magazine reveals some of the common and silly mistakes that papers make, which is very good for us to work with caution and avoid repeating the mistakes.

The content of the magazine is also very relevant to us in the media industry. While you have started with the challenges media face in the first issue, we would appreciate if BMF could offer solutions as to how we can overcome this problem in the future editions.

Usha Drukpa
The Journalist

YOUR SPACE

Any comment or feedback on the Review will be carried on this page starting from the second edition of the publication.

Journalism practitioners, academics, students and regular consumers of news can use the space to write about issues relating to the Bhutanese news media.

*Please email them to bmf@bmf.bt
Proper names and address should accompany.*



S THERE JOURNALISM?

Nosy, sensationalist, partisan, government mouthpiece, opposition rag, disrespectful, rubble rouser are a few terms labelled against journalists.

Some of these accusations, at times, might be well-founded and serve as good feedback to those who swear by the profession.

But what is unnerving of all accusations, especially when media houses are saddled with sustainability issues, is the euphemistically posed question of whether Bhutanese media is practicing journalism.

Intellectuals and academics say journalism in Bhutan is deficient at two levels.

One is content. "Letters people write to the paper are better researched than stories newspapers publish," was a comment an observer made several years ago. Much of its contents were seen focusing on official releases, while stories outside urban centres were either forgotten or ignored.

"It's black and white and later as I read on, it's red all over," a native English language speaker, who resides in Thimphu, once told a local newspaper reporter.

The other is on the basic purpose of journalism, which is to provide verified and unbiased information in a compelling way so citizens and government can make informed decisions.

In fulfilling this responsibility, journalists must strive to present information in a fair and objective manner as it plays the watchdog role to bring about greater transparency in power centres, expose wrongs, corruption and highlight successes.

Yet, observers say that media barely goes beyond what is fed to them and in many instances degrade the freedom of being watch dogs by exploiting it for other reasons such as getting back at newsmakers and sometimes, taking to activism.

At the other end of the spectrum is the lay

public who believe that slinging allegations of corruption is journalism and everyone in a position of power today is corrupt, be it politicians, senior government officials or successful businesses.

SO IS THERE JOURNALISM?

"It depends on how one defines journalism," says Ugyen Penjor, the managing editor of Kuensel, the country's oldest newspaper, which turns 30 in August 2016.

He believes that despite hurdles of operating in a small hierarchical society that is still very much a developing country, the local media is fulfilling its primary role of informing the people by reporting the news.

As a daily news service, he said Kuensel was doing its bit to keep people informed of the happenings within the country, be it government decisions or public issues that merit government attention.

The paper highlighted rural issues where most Bhutanese live and strove to give its readers a little more on the weekends through features and human-interest stories. These, he said, were other aspects besides the reader-imposed bent on bashing government and its policies.

Editors of a few news media that gathered to discuss sustenance of private newspapers not so long ago agreed that the growing literate section of the population, with exposure to outside media, wished to see critical reporting to keep in check power centres, whose actions or inactions invariably affect everyone.

A former editor of a private newspaper said such demands came from a critical mass of readers, most of whom he believed, were senior civil servants, who wished to see the kind of critical reporting seen in other democratic societies.

"The consensus among us journalists is that the Bhutanese bureaucracy should be as willing to share





CAUGHT ON CAMERA: A BBS district correspondent interviews a farmer in Trongsa

information and speak to the media without inhibition as in such societies with which Bhutanese journalism is being compared to," he said.

Journalist Association of Bhutan president and national television talk show host, Dawa, was adamant that such a shift should come through persistent reporting of Bhutanese journalists.

Most reporters in the newsrooms, he observed, were there to make a living and not built to persevere, or driven by purpose and passion.

HOW IT WAS

Yet, to be fair, and to be in context, one

needs to consider how far Bhutanese media has come since conventional media formally emerged 29 years ago.

In the early years, when the weekly Kuensel and Bhutan Broadcasting radio service were the only news media around, they practiced what would be regarded as the earliest models of "development journalism", focusing on government efforts to bring about socio-economic development and keeping the nation informed.

During a media forum held several years ago, a senior journalist recalled how in the early days, even the smallest piece of news could be deemed sensitive. A story on a forest road construction above Chamgang, Thimphu, went

in as "forest construction" because it was felt the word "road" might be construed, by others, as building links to the north.

Archives show that the news media then, besides informing the public on the government's plans and policies and other key decisions, also played a role in bringing social change by giving coverage to health and hygiene and common diseases, for instance. It also highlighted emerging issues and challenges faced by a traditional society slowly transforming with modern development.

A former Dzongkha editor of Kuensel, Lopen Choki Dendup, remembers how reporting was about civil servants calling up the newsroom



PHOTO OPP : Local and international photographers during the royal wedding celebrations at Changlimethang in 2011

asking for a reporter to be sent to pick up an internal office order within a ministry.

"To be taking down dictations from a minister of what had to appear in the weekend was considered a big responsibility," he said.

EVOLVING MEDIA

But the media evolved with a changing Bhutan and coverage slowly began to look at loopholes in government policies, poorly done government projects, while also documenting changes taking place through stories that had flair and depth.

In the years leading to the country's transition to a parliamentary system of governance and the emergence of other media houses, the emphasis shifted to breaking stories in a contest for eyeballs and the limited advertisement pie.

Media houses went to great lengths to outdo the other and carve a niche. Allegations became the name of the game, something new

to Bhutanese media, but routine elsewhere.

Given the kind of majority the former government enjoyed in the Parliament, the news media along with the National Council, was often accused of slanting towards the two-member opposition.

Towards the fag end of the first elected government's tenure, an international observer said the Bhutanese media had been irresponsible, referring to dearth of research in stories, bad reporting and tacit engagement in partisan politics.

Somewhere along the way, media houses and its practitioners lost sight of the basic building blocks of good journalism. Everyone was looking up for the big story, but forgot to look at the path they were treading.

"We need a strong media, represented by professional journalists today," good governance committee chairperson of the National Assembly, Dawa Gyaltsen, demanded over the phone.

Although the government seemed at sea with resolving issues pertaining to the Bhutanese news media today, he insisted for a kind of journalism that stated in certain what was right or wrong about issues it covered.



**LETTERS PEOPLE WRITE
TO THE PAPER ARE BETTER
RESEARCHED THAN
STORIES ITS REPORTERS
PUBLISH"**

**A COMMENT TO
A LOCAL NEWSPAPER**

BACK TO BASICS

In retrospect, it has been one step forward, two steps back for Bhutanese journalism as it struggles to live up to its mandate in a new political environment, which Bhutanese society itself is still coming to terms with.

Bhutan is still a developing country with poverty and high dependence on donor funds to bring socio-economic change. Then there are the emerging challenges of rapid urbanisation, unemployment and the need for skilled human resources.

So development journalism is still important and will continue to be for years to come and although journalists and media houses aspire to make the loudest sound it can, at this

stage journalism in Bhutan needs to strengthen its basics. "The foundations have to be strong. They are the building blocks of good journalism," a media observer said.

CHANGING MEDIA SCENARIO

Advances in technology have dramatically transformed the way people obtain and share information and it has changed the dynamics of journalism as well. Today, news of any major event makes it to the social media sites faster than it comes out on conventional news platforms.

Smart phones and internet access has made it possible for anyone to break the news. But people still go back to conventional media because journalists are supposed to be professionals, who

go to where the action is, verify and validate information and present it in a manner that helps people make sense of what is happening.

In fact, experts point out, sound journalistic values have become even more important in a world where communications has been revolutionised by advances in technology.

Journalism in Bhutan will face even in the future, as it does today, public inquiries that challenge its standards, its esteem, its identity. It will be compared and might even be compelled to ape various regional and international news media practices, something that is already happening.

But such inquiries can only be good because it means good journalism matters to Bhutan.

Journalism is investigative

It asks, it analyses, it ponders.

Every time a reporter inquires, shoots a follow up question or does a follow up story, it investigates.

Journalism, by nature, is investigative. It either is, or not at all.

The role of journalism, if determined strictly by democratic norms the country is trudging towards, is to question issues and policies emanating from the powers that be, so it can provide accurate and solid information for people to make informed decisions about the community they live in.

That entails hard legwork, knowing where to hunt for information, cultivating solid contacts and trustworthy sources. While that in itself might be a challenge to many Bhutanese journalists, imagine having to face slammed doors, threat of libel and, the most depressing of them all, dead ends.

That is a reality in journalism.

Watergate scandals and stories of such calibre, though few and far between, are considered investigative journalism at their best because it showcases the dogged efforts of reporters, who consider their work more than just a job.

This is why, journalism is a calling. It cannot be about chasing the same quotes and producing virtually identical stories. That has its own kind, called pack journalism, which is basically stenography.

Often the tendency among Bhutanese journalists is to hinge on findings of audit and anti-corruption agencies of investigations they might conduct on issues of corruption in governance.

The trend, so far, has been of the news media pursuing state-appointed investigations or opposition-initiated ones, taking interest only when official reports are about to be released. Reporters from various newspapers and TV are unleashed only to have the report leaked to them in advance, then boasting who had it first.

If not that, often it is stories dressed up as investigative reporting, when they are only those based on leaked government reports and information, or those of the opposition.

To be able to do more, editors of various newspapers lament their newsrooms lack capacity, manpower, resource and a favourable environment, culturally.

As evident from various investigations the anti-graft agencies carry out, meandering through frustrating paper trails and sifting through as frustrating a number of them, investigative journalism requires time, travel and money.

But this requirement can be bypassed, most senior journalists believe, if the country introduced an access to information legislation.

"How do auditors and anti-corruption officials uncover malpractices in governance?" a national language newspaper editor said. "They have access to some of country's most exclusive information and their law demands that government agencies furnish every information sought."

The Right to Information legislation might not bear the same weight, or wield the same authority, but it would be a good start to an open society. Citizens would know what happens behind numerous closed doors the government and the bureaucracy often resort to in determining the interest of the country and its people.



DZONGKHA NEWSPAPERS- DO THE RULES APPLY?

During an in-house training on basic journalism in one of the newspapers in the capital, a reporter interrupted the session expressing doubts that basic rules of news writing might not apply to his paper, which was in Dzongkha.

What worked as a good lead to a news story, key ingredient to hook the readers, did not apply to Dzongkha, the reporter argued. What could be an important article for an English paper, determined through news values, would also not necessarily work for Dzongkha.

The trainer, a former media practitioner, argued that irrespective of language, the basics should apply to all. More discussions followed as to how much of journalism rules are relevant to national language newspapers.

There were often comments that Dzongkha articles read more like official reports or some piece on history and not like news stories. Should the news reports read the same as English? How different is it?

Although the first edition of Kuensel, country's oldest paper, had come out in Choeyked, Dzongkha pages were gradually filled with contents translated from English papers. Only in the early 1990s, Dzongkha editorial started pursuing stories on their own.

As English papers took dominance in circulation and readership, numerous efforts were made to promote Dzongkha papers, one platform that contributed in promoting the national language. All English papers were required to

publish a Dzongkha edition.

Today, besides the single sheet insert to meet the requirement, there are four private Dzongkha paper, some of which are erratic, or have shrunken in size.

By simple definition, newspapers are expected to inform readers. Are Dzongkha papers today serving the purpose? In Bhutan's case, are Dzongkha papers about journalism or is it about promoting the national language?

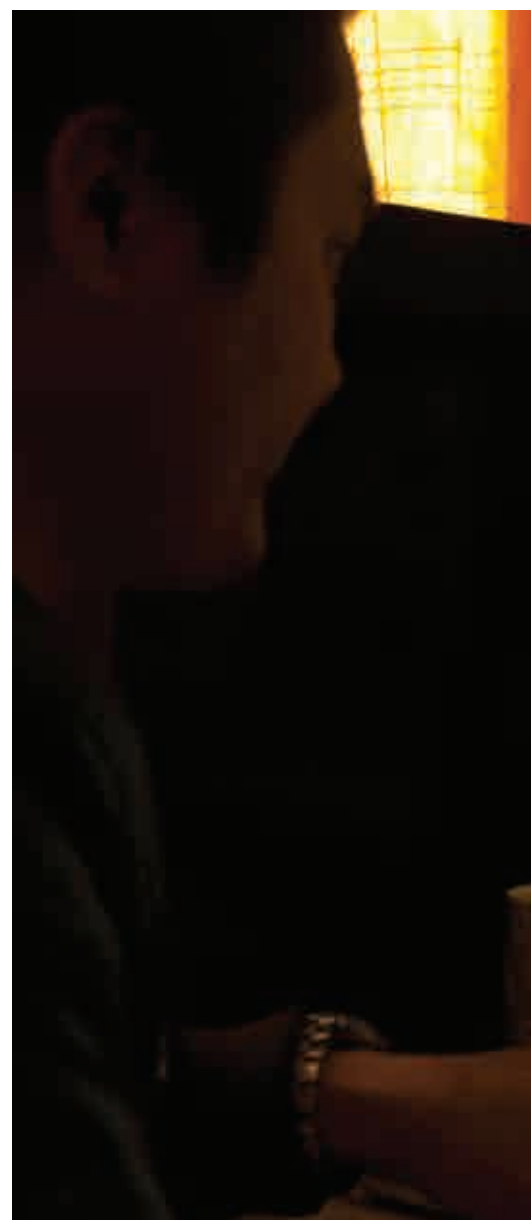
Kuensel's chief reporter with Dzongkha editorial, Nima Wangdi said while they are definitely fulfilling the role of informing people, it would not always work like the English papers.

"We go by what our readers want," he said. "It might read boring to others but our readers are comfortable with such news format."



**IT MIGHT READ BORING TO
OTHERS BUT OUR READERS
ARE COMFORTABLE WITH
SUCH NEWS FORMAT"**

**NIMA WANGDI
CHIEF REPORTER
DZONGKHA, KUENSEL**



LAID OUT: The Druk Neytsuel newspaper is formatted

Readers, it has been established, are mostly teachers and students, local leaders, monks, legislators and farmers.

He said the language restricted them to pursue some stories, especially if technical, for want of jargons.

"Unless the words are familiar to the readers, it becomes difficult to articulate," Nima Wangdi said. Dictionaries are perused to explain "complicated" terms.

Some stories, when attempted to write in English news format, appeared distorted or read awkward.

The use of direct quote also did not work



for Dzongkha, which otherwise added impact for English news. Not knowing how to go about, they paraphrased quotes.

Kuensel has a team of about eight people, two in the district, running the Dzongkha editorial. While they ensure the cover stories are same as the sister paper in English, inside contents vary more often.

Nima Wangdi said most Dzongkha reporters, who are bilingual, find it easier to write in

English when it comes to news.

Editor of the first independent Dzongkha paper, Druk Nyetsuel, Karma Chopel said in determining the content of his paper, it's mostly

culture related stories that get the space. They also have an entire page dedicated to religion. Other news are based on press releases they receive.

He also said the journalistic news writing format did not apply to Dzongkha.

"The style is different from English," he said.

But it is a general consensus that Dzongkha newspapers should do both- language promotion as well as journalism. The two would complement each other.

If the paper tackled bigger, exclusive stories, readers, even those who do not follow Dzongkha, would automatically be drawn to the language.

Dzongkha media practitioners, however, said that would take a while since interest from newsmakers, including policy makers rendered luke warm response to Dzongkha media, refusing interviews and denying information.

འབྲུག་ལེའུ་སྤུལ་

THE NUMBERS AT CHANGLIMETHANG

Besides the historic win, the 2018 World Cup qualifier match between Bhutan and Sri Lanka on March 17 will also be remembered for the crowd at the Changlimethang national stadium.

It was one of the largest Changlimethang has seen and half the crowd comprised screaming Thimphu school students who were given the afternoon off, as were civil servants, to cheer

the national squad.

With entry free, the stadium filled up at least an hour before kick off and hundreds had to be turned away because there was no more space inside.

But how many people were actually inside the stadium that pulsating afternoon when the thunderous roars of the crowd could be heard almost from a mile when play began?

The match received huge coverage both by local and international media but figures varied on the numbers at Changlimethang stadium, which also serves as the venue for national events such as the National Day celebrations on December 17.

One report said 20,000 fans had gathered before the match could begin when the stadium gates were closed. Another story said the

stadium built for 25,000 people were bursting at its seams. Kuensel reported that the stadium built for 30,000 had already reached its capacity so the gates had to be closed.

The Bhutanese, a weekly paper, quoted a Bhutan Football Federation official saying the stadium had exceeded its capacity of 15,000, as approved by the FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association), during the warm up session itself so the gates had to be closed to avoid overcrowding.

So Bhutan's historic event does not have a close to possible number of how many people squeezed into Changlimethang that afternoon apart from a range between 15,000 to 30,000 fans.

This variation may not mean much for other more populous countries where stadium capacities range from 50,000 to a 100,000 and

more. But for Bhutan it's huge considering the country's entire population (projected) is around 700,000.

Getting close to the actual is important because it means being as accurate as possible and accuracy is the first and the only rule of journalism.

It is also important to be as precise as possible because the coverage is important not only for the moment. It remains as a record for all times, which journalists might refer to in future.

Getting the precise numbers for Changlimethang will take some work because the stadium has viewing stands on only one side. The other side is open and tents and chairs are placed outside the pitch when events are held. So some amount of legwork and math

would be required of the reporters to get close to the actual.

The one time when crowd size has raised questions and journalists reporting the figure has been looked upon with suspicion, is during elections campaigns, which the local media has experienced in the past two general elections.

During campaigns, crowd size is indicative of many things such as support or the lack of it for a particular candidate or political party. Reporters have resorted to doing head counts and checking with observers from the election commission for outdoor meetings and counting chairs for indoor meetings.

This was perhaps forgotten in the anxiety and excitement leading up to Bhutan's historic win against Sri Lanka at Changlimethang stadium.





WOMEN IN NEWSROOM

About 18 years ago, when Sonam Zam joined the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) news team, she was greeted with a good number of female and male colleagues.

It was a radio station then, a fairly relaxed and intriguing profession. Gradually, television entered and workload built. There were technical aspects to look at, website to tend to and bureaus to fill. The work place transformed and before she knew it, she had become one of few senior women in the newsroom. Where did others go?

"They left for better opportunities," Sonam Zam, who is today the most senior women on the team, said.

Similarly in Kuensel, women journalists had come and gone. A handful had left the country after they married, while others joined the civil service and private sector.

Today, figures with Bhutan Media Foundation show there are 27 women with the 10 print media, who share the newsroom with 44 men. BBS, on the other hand, has 56 women against 12 men, but that include anchors, presenters and producers.

Besides serving as reporters, women fulfil the role of news editors, web editors and acting editors in the news organisation. But that comes almost decades after men reigned in these positions. What took them so long?

Former "male" media practitioners said they worked with some of the most promising and talented women journalists, some of whom were also being groomed to become editors. But for some reason, most chose to leave. Men left too but for reasons other than marriage and family.

In recent years, deteriorating health of overall media also caused many, both men and women, to leave the business. But for the dailies like Kuensel and BBS, women had faced additional challenge of balancing work and family. While men or women would start the profession

together, this one challenge awaited for women at some level.

"That is one reality women can't escape," Sonam Zam, who has two children, said. "Without government holidays and in having to make it during odd hours, it's not easy for mothers."

That has been the trend the world over.

Perna Suri, a communications specialist, who was in the country to train Bhutanese women in media on leadership skills said journalists who marry or become mothers had either quit profession or taken time off work for children.

"By the time they come back and compete with male counterparts, they are at a lot of disadvantage," the broadcast journalist and a published writer, said.

Back in the country, in Kuensel, women journalists who became mothers were allowed to work from home, with office providing internet facilities. But considering the nature of profession, they couldn't avoid staying outdoor most of the time.

In earlier sessions, women journalists who were mothers expressed worry that constant absence from work during the child's illness or while short of helpers at home could lead to employers losing faith in them. Demanding facilities like crèche could also send off wrong messages that could backfire on their promotion or on hiring women for such jobs.



Perna Suri said while installing such facilities might be a bit of cost, one should think about diversity it would bring to newsroom.

"Any newsroom that is dominated by one gender is missing out a lot," she said. "Women

NUMBER OF WOMEN TO MEN IN THE EDITORIAL OF THE 10 NEWSPAPERS

 (27)

 (44)

NUMBER OF WOMEN TO MEN IN THE EDITORIAL OF BBS (TELEVISION)

 (56)

 (12)



THE POWER OF SHE: A representation of women reporters in Bhutanese newsrooms

bring to newsroom a different way of story telling. How a man would cover it would be very different from how a women journalist would cover the same issue.”

She said it also meant different view points.

For today, one issue that was common across all newsrooms in the country was the fewer representation of women in managerial position.

Sonam Zam, who is now a producer with news and current affairs department said managerial posts are more attractive with better pay packages.

“While it is up to individuals to seek managerial posts, if senior journalists are given equal

deals, if not more, it would help retain good people, be it men or women,” she said.

Senior journalists in media would also add professionalism to the business and add credibility to the industry.

For young female reporters, what was also evident was the lack of mentorship, who would inspire them to climb the ladder in the industry. While senior journalists should play role models, it was deemed important to build networks of formal and informal mentors, even if it was beyond newsrooms. For that, it was important for the effort to come from young reporters themselves too.

“There are a bunch of talented women

journalists in Bhutan,” Prerna Suri said. “They should start voicing opinion a lot more, in newsrooms and outside. Never think there is any assignment which a male colleague can do which we can’t.”

“Start coaching, mentoring, travelling and taking on as many opportunities,” she said.

The three-day training in Paro in April ended on a positive note with women reporters ever more inspired to work harder and make a difference in newsrooms and to the media in Bhutan.

They all realised that as women journalists, they had a better platform to contribute and tackle issues that would bring difference to overall growth of women.



AN OLD HAND IN THE YOUNG MEDIA

Kuensel's Rinzin Wangchuk celebrates his silver jubilee in the media industry

Bhutanese media is often dubbed a young industry, manned by young people. But this one man challenges the statement.

In fact, his friends joke that his years in the media far transcends the age of many people in the industry today. When his colleagues moved on to explore other avenues over the years, he stayed on.

This March, Kuensel's Dzongkha editor Rinzin Wangchuk touched 25 years in the Bhutanese media, making him the longest serving journalist from the ones in the business today.

He stepped into Kuensel newsroom at the age of 22.

"I was recruited as a translator," Rinzin Wangchuk, 47, said. "All the contents in the English paper had to be translated into Dzongkha. Everything, including the world news."

That was in 1990 then and he was introduced to big issues like the situation in the south.

In a few months, he had learnt the tricks of news business. Having exhibited interest in writing news, the present communications secretary Dasho Kinley Dorji, who was the editor then, encouraged him to report news for English.

So he wrote stories for the paper in two languages.

Until then, Rinzin Wangchuk said there was no practice of reporting and writing separately for Dzongkha newspaper.

Rinzin Wangchuk who writes in both languages today said Dasho Kinley Dorji, who he dearly calls his mentor, persuaded him to





AT WORK: Rinzin Wangchuk interviews US ambassador to India Nancy Powell in 2013

“

**I WAS MAKING DIFFERENCE
(THROUGH STORIES)
DESPITE RENDERING MANY
PEOPLE UNHAPPY IN THE
PROCESS”**

RINZIN WANGCHUK

pursue stories on religion, monk body and tradition that he had knowledge of.

But it wasn't until he spent over 15 years in the news business that he felt like a journalist or called himself one.

“By then, having covered some investigative stories like corruptions in education ministry and city corporation, my stories made impact,” he said. “I was making difference despite rendering many people unhappy in the process.”

Having lived the changes in media for 25 years, Rinzin Wangchuk said things started roll-

ing for Bhutanese media with the de-linking of Kuensel from government in 1992 and more so when private newspapers entered in 2006.

However, he said it was very disheartening to see that numerous issues, including financial complications for private media, put the industry back to where it started.

“There was so much competition that pushed us to deliver better, write in depth stories and tackle issues from different angles,” he said. “But that's not happening today.”

On media freedom, Rinzin Wangchuk said Bhutanese media has come a long way and achieved great strides over time.

“Despite the international figures and rankings, we know that there is media freedom,” he said. “Media have been publishing what information they could land”

However, the grip on public information had further tightened over the years. So, the veteran suggests effort needs to be placed on freedom of expression and information on the news-makers.

“But again, considering the nature of profession, much boils down to one's ability to churn out information through contacts you are able to build,” the prestigious Humphrey fellow

said.

For him, the only downside was that journalism had taken precedence over his family before he realised. He regrets for not being next to his wife when all his four children were born.

He said the thought of leaving the profession often crossed his mind.

“I really believed in what I was doing and that made me hang on,” the man from Drametse, Mongar, said.

He takes pride in having led the culture of independent reporting for Dzongkha paper, which today has separate editorial team.

Looking back, he draws immense satisfaction from being a part of important national events all these years, like the installation of Trongsa Penlop in 2004, leading the Kuensel team in the public consultation of draft Constitution and coronation of His Majesty The King, among others.

He was also the only Bhutanese within the Bhutanese media covering United States elections from the field in 2012. Today, he covers judiciary and corruption issues, among others.

Asked whether he would quit media anytime now like many of his former colleagues, he said he was more worried about what his next story was going to be.



NEW YEAR, NEW DEVELOPMENTS

As 2015 dawned, Bhutanese news media continued to follow numerous stories varying from government policies to rural issues in its ever dogged spirit.

But unlike many others who sought a fresh start in the new year, it was not possible for media to shrug off some of the issues they covered in the previous issues or the previous year so to say.

Two prominent subjects that spilled over from the yore were that of the three government secretaries the Cabinet found faulty in their deal-

ings and the divulged question paper of Class XII examination in December.

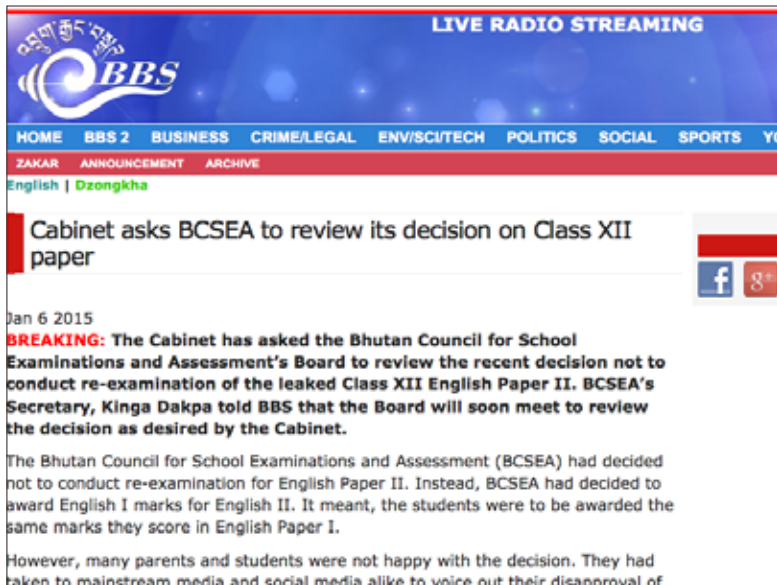
On the secretaries, the development then was a press release Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) issued early in the week, seeking evidence from the Cabinet to act on them.

As expected of a newspaper, Kuensel tried to make "more" sense out of the decision RCSC made. They brought in legal experts and other views to dissect the layers in the numerous legal sections RCSC had cited.

Since the news, through press release, was already broken on social media, the attempt to

JANUARY





analyse issues and give readers more than the press release content was a wise follow up to make.

Other weekend papers kept it straight though. They stuck with the press releases from RCSC and subsequent statement from the Prime Minister, welcoming the move.

Instead, the bigger story for the weekend paper The Bhutanese was on private media situation based on a communications ministry report. It highlighted the fact that financial distress, if left unattended, could leave Bhutan without any private newspapers.

Within the industry, this also followed with formation of Media Owners Association that would look at sustainability and economic issues concerning media, mainly private.

Sunday papers like the Journalist and Bhutan Times ran the "secretaries" story inside, strictly press release recitation again. Establishment of state mining corporation and winter youth enrichment program made their other cover stories.

One issue that media axed from all

corners was the examination board's decision to award English paper I marked for the leaked English II paper while deciding to avoid re-examination.

The decision did not go down well with parents and students. Story made headlines for several evenings on national television Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) and dominated front page of the papers.

Questioning the logic of the decision, there were follow up stories in how parents and students felt. There were editorials and letters from people. Opposition blamed the government for their "indecision" and more discussions poured on social media.

In what can qualify as an impact of media that can marshall majority opinion for decision makers to base on, Cabinet was seen stepping in, asking the examination board to revisit the decision.

With a number of developments taking place, BBS and some papers resorted to breaking news online first.

Mid month saw the Prime Minister creating an impression at the business

summit in Gujarat, India.

The next evening, BBS reported of Prime Minister making headlines in Indian newspapers and social media as he delivered a speech "interjected" with Hindi that worked well with the crowd. The speech sold out because of its simplicity while conveying powerful message as to why Bhutan was the right place to invest, "with values".

Highlighting how Bhutan stole the show amid business giants and world leaders, The Bhutanese dissected and analysed the speech to read into underlying messages.

Business Bhutan went on to quote the prime minister in Hindi (typed in English) without translation, clearly with the assumption that readers would understand it. Bhutan Today settled for picture stories from the trip. Kuensel kept it fairly straight, reporting what was said at the summit, a speech-story. Dzongkha papers also covered the trip mostly based on press releases.

While it's rare with The Bhutanese and Business Bhutan, rural news, mainly related to farming and farm products also appeared in the cover of the newspaper. His Majesty's visit to Trashigang, corporate pay hike and hydropower revenue made other headlines for the month. Court verdicts of statutory rapes and chorten vandalism also dotted the coverage throughout.

Meanwhile, careless typos, inconsistencies in grammar and redundancy continue to perforate news stories. Passive headlines and ineffective leads are a common feature. In some cases, a full sentence make up the headline, far from the standard practice.

Except for BBS and Kuensel, rural coverage is minimal in other papers. Stories are also accompanied with poor quality photographs, which are also mostly of official events.



FEBRUARY WAS FIERY

The eve of February marked the onset of fire season.

It began in Thimphu, four days before forest officials were to begin educating the capital city residents, bordering tree lines, of the need to prevent forest fires.

Gradually incidents of forest fires in Pemagatshel, Trashigang and Trashiyangtse began filling spaces in subsequent issues of the national daily, Kuensel and national television of Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS).

The fire that razed 81 out of more than 130 shops, mostly temporary shacks that made up Sarpang town, were reduced to picture stories in the rest of the newspapers that saw it already served in the dailies.

Causes of fire, damage done to forest and properties in case of structures, although under investigation at the time stories of them were written about, local news media failed to follow up on them. Stories based on experiences of those affected by the fire were as rare as it was common to come across profuse use of official views.

There were as many stories of corruption.

The preliminary hearing of Lhakhang Karpo case in which the foreign minister was charged for abuse of functions in his capacity as the Haa dzongda before resigning to join politics in 2013, made headlines in both BBS and Kuensel. BBS TV footage of the foreign minister leaving the Haa district court at the end of a court

proceeding prompted Anti-Corruption Commission to remind the government that the minister was disallowed the privileges accorded to him by the state.

What the Bhutanese news media failed to ask, something most of its readers did, was how the minister was allowed to partake in the electoral process, especially knowing these charges against him were pointed up in the initial sages of the 2013 election.

The Bhutanese settled for something in the inside, that of some Parliament members failing to pay the 50 percent sales tax on the SUVs they had bought even after expiry of one-month grace the revenue and customs officials granted them.

Stories from the districts made up much of Kuensel front page in February, others settled for the staple, spot news and event-based ones. A freelance writer's contribution made the top story in one issue of The Bhutanese. The contribution was based on a report other news media had already covered. What the paper could have done, something other news media missed, was pick issues the study pointed out aplenty and pursue them as individual stories or analysis.

Corporate pay hike coming almost a year after civil servants were given theirs, the Bhutanese New Year and His Majesty's birth anniversary all happening towards the end of February sealed the month on a celebratory note.

The newspapers took a weeklong annual break before bracing up for the year of the sheep.

FEBRUARY





THE **FIRST MONTH** OF THE YEAR OF THE SHEEP

Latest developments on the three secretaries to the government, surrendered by the Cabinet to the civil service commission in December last year, kicked off the Year of Sheep.

Except for one weekly it was the lead government and politics news story in all the other media. In focus was the commission and how it would handle the conflict between the bureaucracy and the elected Cabinet.

MARCH

The secretaries were surrendered because they took a unilateral decision to write to the government of India on corruption in the Bhutan's hydropower sector alleged by an Indian energy & hydropower journal. The Cabinet felt the letter's content and tone could jeopardise Indo-Bhutan relations.

The commission chose the middle path, between reinstatement and eviction, and on February 28, announced that it had

decided to reassign the secretaries after considering the findings of its investigation. According to civil service rules reassignment is considered a major penalty.

While the Cabinet said it respected the commission's decision even if did not agree with it, the decision worked in favour of the elected government who wanted the senior and seasoned bureaucrats out of the way.

The opposition, on its part, called for the reinstatement of the secretaries to their previous



AWAY: Bhutanese students in Sri Lanka cheer the national team

positions and held the economic affairs minister and Cabinet accountable for the lack of coordination in the functioning between the Cabinet and the committee of secretaries.

The media coverage, reflecting which side of the fence they looked at the issue from, drew numerous comments on social media and served as the topic of discussion online and profound and intense debate offline.

Some media praised the commission's decision to bring closure to the issue, which could have been avoided, and others highlighted the opposition's demand for reinstatement as disrespect of the independent commission.

But the biggest and most exciting news in March, which blanketed everything else, came from the sports arena.

Bhutan's debut in the 2018 World Cup qualifiers as the worst team in the world and its subsequent victory against cricket nation, Sri Lanka, 35 places up in the FIFA rankings, drew the world's attention.

International media covered the inspiring story of how a national team, cobbled together from a bunch of students and young football enthusiasts, beat the odds to move to the group stage.

For Bhutan, it brought the people together as a nation behind the national squad. This was exemplified in the packed Changlimithang national stadium that gathered hours before the game to support the team.

A noteworthy development in the midst of the fervor generated by football was a letter

posted on social media from a Bhutanese student studying in Sri Lanka.

The letter talked of the good treatment extended to the Bhutanese students who went to cheer the Bhutanese team during the first round match in Sri Lanka and reminded the Bhutanese crowd to be respectful and graceful to the Lankan team during the second encounter in Changlimithang. This resonated with Bhutanese facebookers and the message quickly circulated.

In terms of coverage some media houses relied on live tweets to give real time information on the home and away matches although a live streaming attempt of the Changlimithang match by the national broadcaster went awry.

Bhutan's historic win in the qualifiers made front-page news in all the local media with goal scorers emerging as national heroes.

Yet local coverage was limited to the build up and of the matches. The Bhutanese weekly newspaper tried to take it a step further writing other related stories such as the need for more support to the sport, the football academy and the crowd issues Changlimithang stadium faced.

Readers had hoped the local media would take a closer look and analyse the national squad's brilliant performance in the qualifiers. Was it sheer luck backed by motivation and determination that brought the team this far? Had the focus on grass roots football, which began more than a decade ago, and the investment in infrastructure raised standards?



TOBACCO NATION: According to Bhutan Today

Instead a number of weeklies chose to run the stories by the international media and one weekly paper did not even credit the source of its incomplete international story.

International reports had quotes from at least one player saying that television had helped him improve his playing.

With Bhutan now in the group qualifying stage and eight matches to play over the next 12 months football is likely to be the news through 2015.

Once the football fever had died down the other important development news covered by at least two papers was on drinking water shortage in rural Bhutan.

Based on a 2014 survey report, The Bhutanese newspaper ran the story as its headline saying that 17 percent of rural households are not getting drinking water. Kuensel ran the story two days later saying that 13,732 rural households face a drinking water problem.



HOME: The Bhutan - Sri Lanka encounter at Changlimethang drew the attention of the local and international media

The prime minister's visit to the U.S. to raise a fund of USD 80 million for sustainable conservation also received widespread coverage in the local media. Media houses ran not one or two but several photos on the PM's meeting with Google, Worldbank and the Bhutanese community in New York in a single edition. The PM's 30-minute interview with Charlie Rose in the United States, where he explained Bhutan's transition to a democracy, was available on social networking sites.

Throughout March, Kuensel followed the Lhakhang Karpo case involving the foreign minister, which is being heard at the Haa district court, doing a total of 11 stories on the submissions and rebuttals. None of the other newspapers covered the issue in March.

The other development news, which had a lot of tongues wagging, was on the govern-

ment deferring the 68km Nganglam-Dewathang highway and dropping of the Lhamoizingkha-Sarpang highway, both funded by Asian Development Bank.

The government stated security reasons for the decision although the general perception was that these roads would improve security for Bhutanese since they would not have to travel through India to get to these locations.

One news item that raised a few eyebrows was a story carried by the March 22nd edition of the Bhutan Today weekly, which said that 96 percent of the Bhutanese population use tobacco. The story says it used figures from a survey carried out by the World Health Organisation between April to June last year, which surveyed adults between 18-69 years.

In terms of stories from rural Bhutan, Kuen-

sel had 20 stories from the interiors sent by its five bureau correspondents ranging from water shortage, rural electrification, human wildlife conflict to short human interest features. Bhutan Today had two rural stories filed by its correspondent in the south-eastern town of Samdrup Jongkhar.

The agriculture ministry website also served as a useful source of stories such as the sighting on snow leopard triplets, which was widely covered by the local media.

Other notable developments in March was the launch of the edesk that allows the prime minister to monitor delivery of government to citizen services and BBS's talk show with the first Bhutanese gay to come out in the open followed by Kuensel's coverage on the same topic.



TRAGIC APRIL

April's colossal but tragic news came around noon of the 25th when a devastating quake hit neighbouring Nepal, 70 miles northwest of the capital, Kathmandu.

By April 29, official figures put the death toll at more than 5,000 in the 7.8 magnitude quake, which flattened parts of ancient Kathmandu, numerous villages in the countryside and set off avalanches burying mountaineers near Everest.

The tremors and its aftershocks were felt throughout the region including Bhutan, India, Bangladesh and China.

Bhutanese made frantic attempts to contact friends and relatives in Nepal but communication lines were totally down in Kathmandu.

People searched the Internet for information on the aftermath. Local media sites had nothing, not even a localised story of Bhutan feeling the tremors and of people's reactions.

Government officials began to tweet hours later to say that Bhutanese at the SAARC Secretariat office in Kathmandu and the two airlines offices were reported safe.

Other official tweets reported no damages or casualties around the country and to the country's hydropower infrastructure.

In the evening news, the BBS national television reported what other international news channels had aired. They did have an extra line in their coverage coming from a BBS producer who was in Nepal reporting that Bhutanese pilgrims attending a blessing in Kathmandu were safe.

A day after the earthquake, the Sunday newspapers, The Journalist, Bhutan Today and Bhutan Times had no mention of Bhutanese in Nepal but ran frontpage Internet pictures of the devastation in Nepal. Bhutan Today had a confusing story that was mixed with a 2011 earthquake report in northeast India.

On Sunday afternoon BBS facebooked that

on royal command a relief team would be leaving for Nepal the next day. Contact numbers of Bhutanese officials in Nepal were also shared for people seeking information.

Drukair flights from Kathmandu began arriving with Bhutanese evacuated from Nepal.

The next day, a 63-member relief team left on a special flight with Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay and the health minister with a cheque of USD 1 million as assistance to Nepal.

Druk Air and Tashi Air together evacuated more than 200 Bhutanese from Kathmandu by Monday, April 27.

Reports in the local media stayed with the Bhutanese relief team in Nepal and on its work there. A BBS crew with the relief team has been sending updates.

Many people expected that at least Kuensel would send a reporter to Nepal, given its proximity and geographic similarity, to cover the devastation and rescue operations.

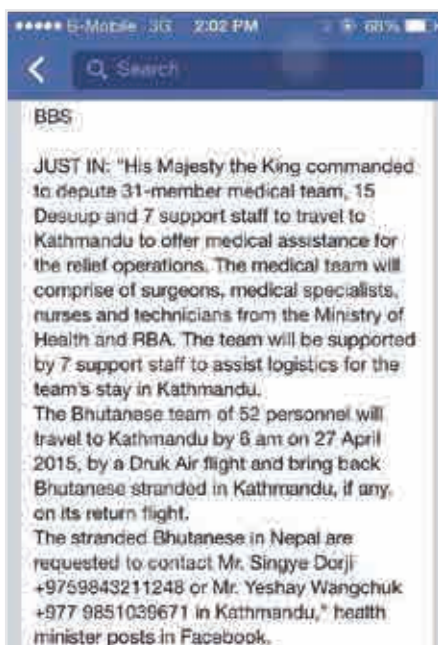
For most Bhutanese, the key concern was if Bhutan was next in line for a big quake and of the country's preparedness levels in terms of construction quality and relief and rescue.

APRIL



NEPAL EARTHQUAKE: What Sunday papers said





Nepal's situation exposed the challenges Bhutan could face from a jammed airport to total break down in communication services and coordination difficulties in the search, rescue and relief efforts.

While people shared studies on the Internet on forecasts by experts on the next quake in the Himalayan zone the local media did not delve into such questions and preparedness in April.

Earlier in the month, riding the news waves were the flower exhibition in Paro, windstorm in the south, football, court cases, power tillers and Dungsam cement.

All mainstream news media ran colourful and multiple photos of the flower exhibition event that offered a rare glimpse of the Royal grandmother inaugurating the exhibition. But papers missed the bumper to bumper traffic on the final day of the exhibition, which coincided with the closing of the Paro Tshechu.

Only Kuensel and BBS reported on the windstorm that affected 989 structures across 11 dzongkhags in the south.

Still reeling from last month's World Cup qualifiers football feat, considerable space was allocated to the sport, starting with Bhutan Today's frontpage coverage of Bhutan's 46 places climb in the FIFA ranking.

After the group stage fixture was declared in Malaysia putting Bhutan in Group C against China, Qatar, Maldives and Hong Kong, it was reported that Bhutan didn't have the required budget of over Nu 26 million to play the away games and host the home legs, even with FIFA's

USD 300,000 support. Bhutan Football Federation reached out to the government for help.

A Kuenselonline poll reveals that Bhutan's best chance of a win was against Hong Kong although 42 percent felt Bhutan would not win any games.

The newly named Yanmar Thimphu Premier league, the most prestigious local tournament, kicked off with many players from outside the country including a former Italian football league coach, who left after a week.

If coverage is indicative of importance of a news, the discovery of the Burmese Shrike species in Bhutan's forests would have ranked high.

Every English newspaper had a similar size story with a photo. Kuensel, BBS and The Bhutanese ran the story on April 4, Business Bhutan on April 11, Bhutan Times and The Journalist on April 12. Twelve days after the first coverage, Bhutan Today ran the story on April 16.

Without a dedicated photo editor in all the newspapers, photos were poorly cropped suggesting the house rule of thumb being "cropped for space".

A mid-month story in Kuensel got health officials worried when it erroneously printed "An outbreak of smallpox", which was later corrected on Kuenselonline.

Kuensel also reported a reversal in the urban migration trend in Sephu gewog, Wangduephodrang, based on their findings.

In the ongoing lhakhang Karpo case at Haa, which only Kuensel and BBS covered, the defence produced an undated document signed



by 8 of the 11 tender committee members agreeing to set up the controversial saw mill.

The Penden cement filed a case against Kuensel for defamation in a story which said the company was in deep waters. News media also covered DPT's intentions to withdraw its defamation case against Dasho Paljor J Dorji.

Dungsam cement was in the news for embezzlement by an employee and the loss suffered by its sister company, Dungsam polymers.

ACC investigations of the customs in Phuentsholing estimated daily losses of upto Nu. 20 million in tax evasion according to a Kuensel story.

The Journalist, in its April 12 issue, chose to run the same picture twice on a single story, on people registered with disabilities from Samtse.

April also saw the KR-II grant from Japan officially end after 30 years of support with the last grant of 239 power tillers.

Through the month, The Bhutanese continued with their paragraph long headlines, Kuensel stuck to its typos, The Journalist had almost the same amount of World Internet reports as its limited local news and Bhutan Times carried numerous captionless pictures.



HARDLY HANDFUL: The picture of the Burmese Shrike that was published in several weeklies

YOUR IDEA OF JOURNALISM... IS IT PRACTICED HERE?

Editors of Bhutanese news media respond

RINZIN DORJI
EDITOR
GYALCHI SARSHOG

Media play a central role in democracy. Citizens negotiate their perception of government and politics through the eyes of media. Therefore, media should be responsible for conveying accurate and transparent account of politics. However, since media situation in Bhutan is deplorable, especially for private media houses, it's difficult to say that such responsibilities, in true sense, can be fulfilled here.

”

SONAM TASHI
EDITOR
BHUTAN TIMES

In Bhutan, the idea of journalism is basically to report news. However, that too is compromised because of weak financial status.

”



SARASWATI SUNDAS
ACTING EDITOR
BUSINESS BHUTAN

Journalism is a new culture in Bhutan and emerging in line with democracy despite challenges. People are still getting used to the idea of journalism and roles and responsibilities of journalists.

While one might argue that future of journalism is bleak, I see it as a dynamic career opportunity for those who want to make a difference and be a part of the change.

Journalism is practiced in Bhutan but we have a lot to do as a young media in a young democracy. Our responsibilities should go beyond collecting and disseminating information.

”



DORJI WANGCHUK
EDITOR
DRUK YOEDZER

Apart from informing public and keeping government and corruption in check, journalism should also be about reporting issues of interest to the rural people. However, such stories seldom feature owing to financial instability of the media in Bhutan. As a result, journalism fails to be the voice for voiceless rural people. Journalism in Bhutan also needs to consider reporting on other matters of public importance like culture, language and tradition.

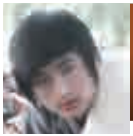
”



JIGME THINLEY
EDITOR
BBS

Journalism is not always about facts and figures. It is also about values. The values of being a Bhutanese. This is what I feel a Bhutanese Journalism should be.

”



DAWA NORBU
MANAGING EDITOR
THE JOURNALIST

Under right conditions, journalism would be about a passionate journey towards fetching truth and

informing people. But considering the situation today, Bhutan is deprived of good journalism. Youth and graduates show less interest in taking up the profession. Those practicing it are also ill equipped. Private media still lacks assistance and are thus ineffective.



Journalism, from my perspective, is a platform for expression of thoughts and ideas to further the human cause.

It can include government policy, issues of private and public sectors, of laws and order, and more.

In Bhutan, media being young, I rarely see it being practice to the full though. There are hesitations among journalists to go all out while newsmakers hesitate to share information. To build a strong democratic culture, country needs a strong media.



KARMA CHOPHEL
EDITOR
DRUK NEYTHSUEL
THIMPHU



RABI C DAHAL
MANAGING EDITOR
BHUTAN OBSERVER -
ONLINE NEWS

It's the practice of investigating and reporting activities, issues and events to the audience through various mediums. Those working in this field have to provide

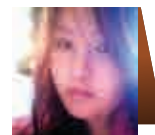
audiences with accurate and reliable information.

There was a time when private media, introduced in preparation of the first parliamentary elections, was in full swing. At the time, a genuine political debate was fostered among Bhutan's population. Bhutan's reality of a media financially dependent on government and a rural population that is not easily drawn into the public discourse can make journalism a frustrating profession to pursue.



JIGME WANGCHUK
SUB EDITOR
KUENSEL
CORPORATION LTD.
THIMPHU

Journalism should provide citizens with information they need. By this definition, journalism in Bhutan could do a lot better.



PHUNTSHO CHODEN
OFFICIATING EDITOR
BHUTAN TODAY

The basic role of JOURNALISM is to inform, educate and entertain. It should function as a bridge between the government and the people.

It is also the practice of investigating and reporting events, issues and trends to the mass audiences of print, broadcast and online media such as newspapers, magazines and books, radio and television stations and networks, and blogs and social and mobile media.

I don't think journalism is practiced in Bhutan. Deprived of support and space to grow, media is too weak to tackle issues.



CRITICISE WHERE CRITI- CISM IS DUE, PRAISE WHERE PRAISE IS DUE

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN A GNH SOCIETY?

That's a big question. I think the media should be committed to a GNH society, first of all. Then, the media should try to – in its coverage and everything – support the concept of GNH society. That is best supported by continuously looking at one's coverage, looking at what one is doing and seeing whether one is, in fact, supporting a GNH society or just becoming like the media normally tends to be – critic of society. But it doesn't mean that you should not criticize where criticism is due. But you should also give praise where praise is due. And even in your criticism, you should be careful to see whether there isn't another side to the story. And one needs to avoid the traditional journalistic attitude of being opposed to the government.

MANY PEOPLE SAY THE BHUTANESE MEDIA DON'T HAVE A DIRECTION. WHERE DO YOU THINK THE BHUTANESE MEDIA SHOULD BE HEADED IN TERMS OF DIRECTION?

Well, the classic role for the media is to inform people about what is happening, to act as a watchdog, and to



Sir Mark Tully, a former BBC journalist is the author of many books and recipient of several honours. He was also awarded the title of knighthood in 2002.

enlighten people. I think if you keep these sorts of aims in mind, that's all the direction you need. You don't need to think too complicatedly about the direction. But in your experimental society, you need to do all those things being aware of the aim of making Bhutan a GNH society – increasing the level of happiness, I should say.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD JOURNALIST?

There are all sorts of things that make a good journalist. I think journalists have to be observant and have their eyes open all the time. They have to be understanding as well because you don't get the best out of other people unless you are understanding yourself. They have to be fearless quite often and they have to have a degree of humility so that they do not get carried away by their own importance. They should not think that they are more important than they are. They need to be able to think about who they are writing about. Journalists need to be able to write as well.

One of the problems, I think, with some journalists is they try to be too clever in their writing and they then become complicated. After all, the job of a journalist is to communicate, and you communicate basically by writing in simple, clear language.

YOU MENTIONED IN YOUR TALK THAT THE MEDIA WORLDWIDE ARE INCREASINGLY BECOMING COMMERCIALIZED. BUT IN BHUTAN, SINCE THE MEDIA ARE JUST EMERGING, THE POWER OF COMMERCE HAS NOT FULLY CREPT IN. HOW DO WE PREVENT THE BHUTANESE MEDIA FROM BEING COMMERCIALIZED?

I don't think you can necessarily because as the media develops and as commerce and business develop, it's likely – very

likely – that people will see the media as business opportunities. If that happens, people will set up media and buy media, and you won't be able to stop that. What is very important is to have public sector broadcasting.

SO YOU MEAN COMMERCIALIZATION OF THE MEDIA IS INEVITABLE IN ANY SOCIETY, INCLUDING A GNH SOCIETY?

(Laughs) That's a good question! It then depends really on what society feels, how you combine GNH with market economics. And the more you get on the market economics line, the more likely it is that the media will become commercialized. You are also going to be either dependent on advertising for revenue or you are going to be, as you are at the moment, over-dependent on the government. Once you become dependent on advertising, commercialization and business interest will come into it anyhow. So, that's going to be your problem, I think.

IS THERE ANYTHING THAT THE GOVERNMENT CAN DO TO CURB, IF NOT STOP, THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF THE MEDIA?

I doubt it, frankly, unless they set up a very strict policy and say that only newspapers with certain foundational principles can exist. Then all you journalists will start complaining about the government interfering in the freedom of the press. So, it will be difficult.

BHUTAN IS A DEMOCRACY WITHOUT A RIGHT TO INFORMATION (RTI) ACT. HOW DO YOU DEFINE A DEMOCRACY WITHOUT AN RTI ACT?

Well, a democracy without RTI...we had

India without RTI for a very long time. But I do think that RTI is a great step forward in making a country more democratic because it's a very important way of calling the government to account and of preventing corruption and cheating. In that respect, I wouldn't say you are not a democracy because you don't have it, but I would say you are more democratic if you did have it.

TO AVOID CONFLICTS, WE HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT FINDING A COMMON SPACE BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MEDIA. HOW WOULD WE FIND THAT?

I think there will always be tensions between the government and the media. You know this is inevitable. But the answer lies in not using the word conflict but having deliberation, discussion and debate – the three Ds – and trying to get things sorted out in that way. And the media tends not to understand legitimate concerns of the government. I would say that in your reaction to what the government does, at least understand their legitimate concerns. The word compromise is sometimes thought of as a dirty word, but compromise is very often the best solution. So I would say don't use the word conflict.

• *This interview was first published in Bhutan Observer in 2011*



BREAKING NEWS FIRST

The privilege to “break” the news first is no longer with the mainstream media today. Social media has ruined the game for those in the conventional news business.

So what do you do to keep the business above water when your readers break the news before you?

Elsewhere in the world, news media are either forced to shape up or ship out. By that, most mainstream media have taken onto social media, created presence and moulded accordingly to fit in. What about Bhutanese media?

It is a fact that the industry has also been given a bitter dose of social media medicine.

From the days when competition was about what Kuensel published against what Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) aired, the two state initiated media then, private papers entered and shook the dormant players to life.

In recent years, before one could find a spot in front of the television or grab a copy of a newspaper, information finds

its way to you through phones and laptops.

For Bhutanese media too, the strategy is more on riding the phrase “if you can’t beat them, join them”.

Although not all, the news organisations have attempted to move to where the people are. They have created presence on social media. Kuensel, BBS and The Bhutanese are more frequent with their updates.

When Bhutan beat Sri Lanka in the world cup qualifier last month, many Bhutanese outside the country, including the Prime Minister who was in the United States, acknowledged the updates Kuensel provided on Facebook.

It was the same story during parliamentary elections in 2013 where media houses whisked chains of updates from the polls the entire day.

Press releases government issued found way into social media even before it came out in “news”.

BBS’s online and web editor, Tara Limbu said they continued posting updates on social media even if the news was already out since people expect them to do so.

However, for the evening news and program, she said they gathered more views and opinions and took the stories beyond press releases.

Tara Limbu said while social media has become an important platform today, not everything on it could be taken for truth considering how each individual used it to their own advantage, some under fake identities.

But in turning the benefit around, sometimes BBS used the platform to gather views from people on programs they pursued by floating the idea.

“Social media has global audience,” she said. “Since we want our stories to be read as widely as possible, social media, especially Twitter, allows you that.”

 **BBS**

 **FACEBOOK- 14,612**

 **TWITTER- 13,809**

 **THE BHUTANESE**

 **FACEBOOK- 5,767**

 **TWITTER- 5,606**

 **BHUTAN OBSERVER**

 **FACEBOOK- 3,121**

 **TWITTER- 6,321**

 **BUSINESS BHUTAN**

 **FACEBOOK- 1,121**

 **TWITTER- ?**

 **KUENSEL**

 **FACEBOOK- 25,766**

 **TWITTER- 12,768**

OTHERS: IRREGULAR

LIKED: Number of followers on social media pages

With all sorts of information on social media today, senior media practitioners said mainstream media is under a lot of pressure to deliver better stories so that people still read.

The need was felt for more in-depth and well written articles and news programs for people to follow.

Kuensel’s managing editor Ugyen Penjore said it has become ever more important for them to verify the information and present all sides to a story as opposed to what circulates on social media.

“But there is no harm in picking possible news ideas or keeping in touch with the news makers on Facebook or Twitter,” he said.

However, the mainstream media still enjoyed readers’ trust today. People still visited the papers or switched on television to confirm accuracy of the information or to get more.

Ugyen Penjore said social media kept them on check, which was a positive factor.

“The mistakes we make are marked and mocked on social media,” he said. “We are made to be more cautious and do better.”

But for some private papers that are mired in a number of challenges today, being online was not a priority for now.

“Erratic internet connection and a handful of reporters on the team makes it difficult to dedicate time on social media,” Dawa Norbu, the acting editor of The Journalist, said.

Instead, he said reporters were encouraged to be out in the field, interact with people and gather “real” picture.

There are also others who feel the theory of social media impacting public culture does not hold water for Bhutan at this stage with majority of population still disconnected from internet.





INTERNATIONAL HARDCOPY SUBSCRIPTIONS IN THE DUMPS

With the proliferation of online news content, hardcopy subscriptions of newspapers and magazines have been tumbling almost everywhere for years now.

It is the same story here for newspapers and magazines subscriptions from outside the country.

Not too long ago, the handful of bookstalls in the capital had at least a few hundred subscribers for several weekly news magazines and daily papers from India.

Some bookstalls also sold copies of international news magazines such as Times and Newsweek. Newsweek ceased publishing a print edition and went into an all-digital format in 2013.

Today, hardcopy subscription through bookstores in Thimphu has fallen to 30 copies each of the Times of India and the Economic Times daily newspapers from India.

Among weeklies, subscriptions are only for the Economist, the British publication, which calls itself a newspaper, with about 30 in a week.

The magazine, which covers world events, politics and business and takes an editorial stance in all its articles, is popular with people in the government, corporate and media.

The main subscribers for the two daily newspapers and the weekly Economist are government offices, the two houses of parliament, the Cabinet

secretariat, corporate agencies and one or two individuals.

According to bookstore owners, there are several reasons, besides news proliferating online, which led to drop in subscription particularly in the capital.

One is that the papers arrive a day late since it comes by train from the eastern Indian city of Kolkata. This problem has dogged subscription of daily newspapers from India since the very beginning. But now with the Internet the delay appears much longer and the news outdated.

Until 2009, the Telegraph newspaper published from the neighbouring Indian state of West Bengal used to be the highest subscribed paper in Thimphu. The paper on most days arrived by the evening of the day of publication, except during summer when landslides blocked highways.

The Telegraph had a readership because of its regular coverage of the neighbouring hills of Darjeeling and Kalimpong and Siliguri areas.

In 2012 the subscription business took a hit with the Bhutanese economy facing a shortage of the Indian Rupee. With the central bank restricting the use of Indian Rupee (INR), payments to suppliers in India became problematic who, in any case, were not too enamoured by Bhutan's small market.

Around the same time the govern-

ment began tightening its belt as austerity measures and subscriptions to outside newspapers and magazines by government and corporate offices were the first to be slashed. All these resulted in subscriptions drying up very quickly according to bookstores.

For counter sales bookstores display glossier non news weekly magazines such as Filmfare, Femina and Grazia which sell five to 10 copies a week. Also on display are monthly magazines such as Top Gear, an automobile magazine, which is generally bought by men and the Hello magazine that covers celebrities and royalty, which is the choice of women readers. Good Homes and Good Food monthly magazines are also displayed on the shelves of bookstores.

A recent addition to the subscription list is the Lonely Planet travel magazine with a new hotel in the capital subscribing for five copies.

Government of India offices and agencies such as the embassy, DANTAK and IMTRAT get their copies of newspapers from India but no longer from bookstores in Thimphu.

In the past Reader's digest, Wisdom and Student Today sold well in Thimphu along with numerous newspapers from India, including one or two in regional languages bought by expatriate construction workers.



SHRINKING: Thimphu's hardcopy subscription is limited to 30 copies of two Indian daily newspapers and an international weekly



ASKING THE “RIGHT” QUESTIONS!



Earlier this year, a reporter, during a meet-the-press session with the government was asked to reconsider a question he asked.

The question: whether the foreign minister who was involved in the Lhakhang Karpo case would be suspended from office once the matter reached the court, as the law required.

Instead of an answer, the reporter received a volley of moral advice.

The Prime Minister said it was inappropriate to have asked the question in presence of the foreign minister. The agriculture minister added the reporter's intention was questionable and implied such values would not come “from colleges or universities but from parents”.

The event excited several discussions among journalists after the session. But what happened in that room was not new for media people. Such incidents have happened before, many times, even during the tenure of the first elected government that introduced the meet-the-press session.

Media people would have to listen to a chiding on what role media should play, of issues they should pursue and questions they should ask.

“You are a citizen first, and a journalist later,” the words would roll down a minister.

In some cases, reporters also find themselves off guard when their questions backfire as a minister asks the reporter to try answering the question first. While that's in such forums, reporters encounter tricky situations even when out to gather information almost daily.

A reporter's primary duty is to ask questions so such “occupational hazards” are inevitable. It comes as a package. Reporters normally take it with a pinch of salt.

But while shouldering the noble responsibility of asking questions on behalf of the people, do reporters know what they are asking? Are there questions they are not supposed to ask? What are the right questions?

World over, journalists asking tough questions are lauded. From a cultural setting where one dreads asking questions to elders, Bhutan has come a long way.

For Bhutanese media, from being fed stories through official communications to asking authorities on a number of development issues, reporters moved on to a level of boldness post 2008.

In a democratic setup, besides reinforcing media's importance as the fourth estate, the mandate to keep elected members on check became evident. Thus the general feeling that elected representatives ought to be accessible and ready to answer questions.

Ideally government is obligated to answer to the media that communicates to the larger audience. But how far can media go and where do they draw the line?

The unwritten thumb rule is that media should not step onto personal areas of the

person in question. But if the personal activities have implications on the public office he or she holds, that's business. Moreover, the elected officials, or for that matter any individual holding important public positions, are expected to behave in a manner befitting of his post. When that doesn't happen, it's news.

Media elsewhere, including the immediate neighbour in India, are known for aggressively persuading of their officials, with cameras and voice recorders tossed right across the face. Fortunately that does not happen in Bhutan. Moreover, Bhutanese media have also been very considerate in following issues that stepped even a little on someone's personal ring.

Bhutanese media colleagues are fully aware that they are required to ask the questions, even if it means displeasing the other person, if the matter concerns the public. That's the right question for them.

What they are also aware of is the importance to "word" the question well and to get the "tone" right. Whether it's a farmer or a senior government official who is being interviewed, the questions have to be asked following proper social etiquettes, as expected

of a news reporter.

However, in Bhutan's case, many tend to look at the young local media as incapable, inadequate, ill equipped and poorly trained. It is also true that too often, a reporter asks the wrong questions.

It is common for editors to spell out questions for the reporters to "go out there and ask". For press conferences, a set of questions is drawn for the reporter. And when the gullible reporter throws the question without much knowledge about the subject, officials find it easier to manipulate or dodge it.

What to ask and what not to ask may become clearer once a reporter has a thorough understanding of the subject and knows what he or she wants. Perhaps then, the lectures can be avoided.

As for the democratically elected leaders and those holding public office, it's an unwritten rule that they are answerable to people, media being the channel. Being receptive to questions, encouraging open discussions and providing answers concerning people and the system would spur healthy and transparent process.



TO ASK OR NOT?: Once a month session where reporters ask questions on number of issues



THE PRESS FREEDOM INDEX

- Good situation
- Satisfactory situation
- Noticeable problems
- Difficult situation
- Very serious situation

Among the local media, only Kuensel published an article based on the 2015 Press Freedom Index, released in February this year, where Bhutan slipped 12 places to 104 out of 180 countries from the previous annual rankings.

The 2015 Index highlights the worldwide deterioration in freedom of information in 2014. Beset by wars, the growing threat from non-state operatives, violence during demonstrations and the economic crisis, media freedom is in retreat on all five continents according to the report.

The rankings are supposed to indicate the degree of freedom journalists, news organisations and people using the Internet enjoy as well as efforts by authorities to respect and ensure press freedom.

The Bhutanese media have written extensively about the index in previous years and used it to criticise government's policies and actions to muzzle the media.

This year though, only Kuensel did a story on the index and sought views of the general secretary of the Journalist Association of Bhutan on the trend.

But it was the Kuensel editorial, based on the rankings, which brought it under the spotlight in an article by an Indian journalist who is a regular visitor to Bhutan and known to the Bhutanese media fraternity.

The article, first published in the Diplomat, questioned whether media freedom in Bhutan was really slipping as suggested by the rankings and endorsed by the Kuensel editorial.

All other newspapers published the Diplomat article and in a way endorsed what it said although the article was factually incorrect on some of the happenings in Bhutan.

The Kuensel editorial voiced general griev-

ances related to access to information, the poor financial health of the private media and liberal media licensing policy, which has resulted in too many competing for a very small government advertisement pie. It mentioned a recent circular from the judiciary that disallowed judges from talking directly to the media to highlight barriers to information.

The editorial also tried to make a distinction between visiting journalists writing about Bhutan and the actual conditions under which local journalists operate.

The Diplomat article suggested Kuensel had overlooked other indicators that make up the index and the overall score, which is better than the previous year, and just gone by the rankings to indicate deterioration in freedom of information.

The other indicators such as media pluralism and independence, respect for safety and freedom of journalists and the legislative, institutional and infrastructural environment in which media operates are mentioned in the Kuensel editorial although it does not delve into it.

The Diplomat article points out that violence and harassment of journalists is another indicator, which Kuensel did not highlight, and is where Bhutan scores the highest because it does not happen in Bhutan.

Nepal, for that matter, jumped 15 places in the 2015 index because of a drop in violence by security forces against journalists, especially at demonstrations, according to the report.

The United States fell by three places in the 2015 rankings because of the judicial harassment of a New York Times reporter in connection with the trial of a former CIA officer charged with giving classified information. The arbitrary arrest of 15 journalists during clashes

between police and demonstrators protesting against the fatal shooting of a black teenager by a white police officer was another reason.

As the Diplomat article rightly pointed out rankings can change because conditions improve or deteriorate in other countries and not necessarily because of improvements or deterioration within a particular country.

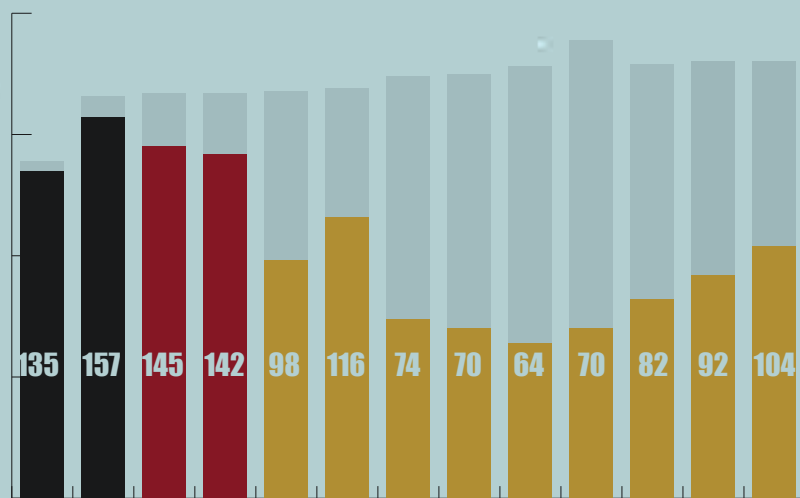
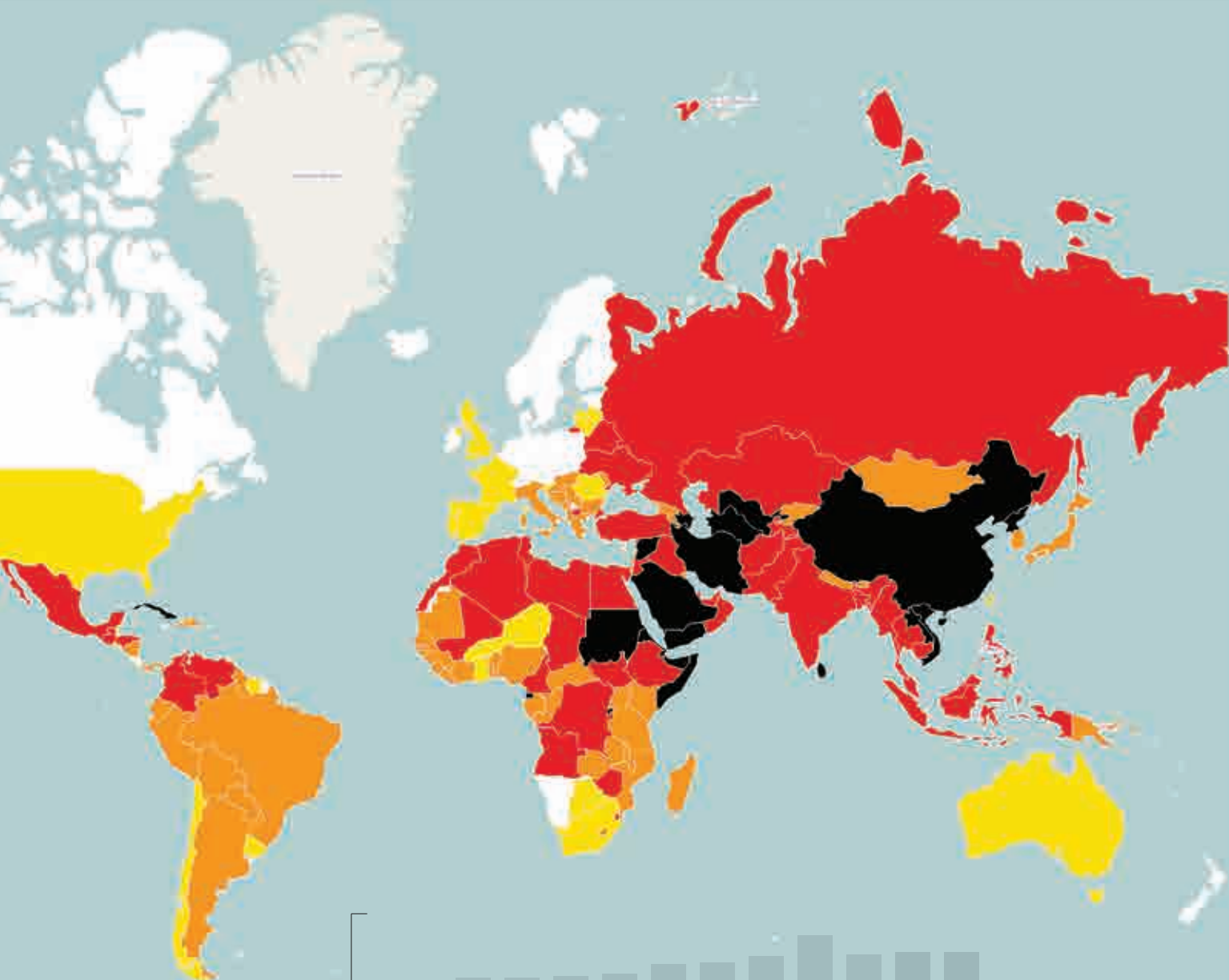
The index published and compiled by Reporters without Borders, an international non-profit organisation registered in France, sends out a questionnaire to compile the index to its partner organisations, network correspondents and to journalists, researchers, jurists and human rights defenders. It consists of 87 questions on problems in providing public with freely reported information.

It also uses quantitative criteria based on the information obtained from its own monitoring to measure level of violence and harassment to which journalists and information providers were subjected to during the assessment period. The assessment period for the 2015 index was from October 2013 to October 2014.

Since the index was first compiled in 2002, Bhutan has been specifically mentioned twice in the report, in the 2002 and 2003, when it was listed among the five worst offenders to press freedom together with North Korea and China.

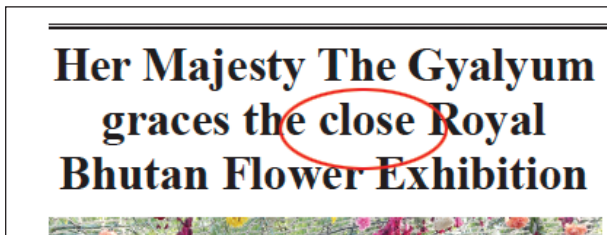
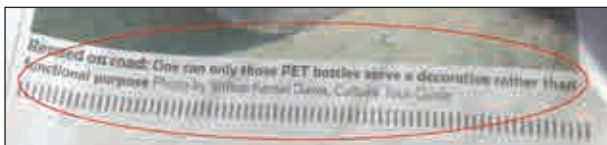
With the coming of private media in 2006 and adoption of a parliamentary system of governance in 2008 its ranking moved up, going to 64 in 2010 and dropping 12 places each year after that for the next four years.

The press freedom index does not measure quality of journalism and human rights violations in general.

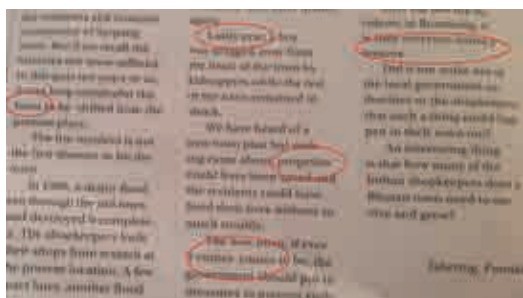
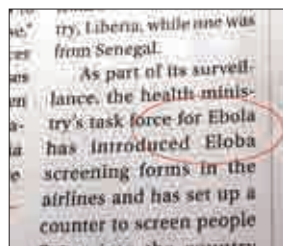




Some common and glaring errors readers helped point out



Back then people pitched tents from the vast fields of Tserigom until Doksum. Ta-wangpas would bring their own mask dances, like the Yak cham and other native chams, to perform at the . Nyagoe or strongman competitions were also held between the Bhuta-



it has put up a request of around Nu 16 mn from the government.

He said the proposal at the moment was given to the Bhutan Olympics Committee (BOC) which as the parent body of sports in Bhutan will formally present it to the government.

"If the matches with other countries are closer home then it will be cheaper but if it is father off like Japan or South Korea then it will be more expensive," said the President.

The national team will also have to travel to play practice matches in other countries. The President said that BFF is getting in touch with middle-east countries for such matches.

Teams would also have to travel a bit early to the destination to get acclimatized to the conditions in the host countries.

The funds will also be required for expenses



on foot over the bridge several time recalling his past stay at Dychhencholing. He said the bridge was very old and there was need for new bridge.

Secondly he mentioned thousands of vehicles passed the bridges daily and a new need for a new bridge was evident.

Thirdly he reminded the youths about the Dychhencholing Palace being located at the site and lastly he said that this year was a very important occasion for Bhutan as nation was celebrating the 60th birth anniversary His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo and it would be like the gift to the King.

Further the Prime Minister told the youths that it was important for them to set good example so that other private construction companies would be motivated to partake in such works and employ every Bhutanese youths as laborers.

imphu

ty The King, d by Her Majesty d personal respects Late Lee Kuan Yew house in Singapore 5, where the former Singapore was in

es had travelled ay respects to the father, who passed 23rd, and offer people of Singapore. y Late Lee Kuan Prime Minister d is credited for ire country from t-world status in a He has been widely s across the world, died and emulated. The King had His Excellency Late

stradivarius leader- a leader who has set the bar of excellence, and conveyed condolences and prayers on behalf of the people of Bhutan for the extraordinary and visionary leader.

His Majesty The King, accompanied by Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen, will attended His Excellency Late Lee Kuan Yew's state funeral, along with other world leaders, upon the special invitation of the Prime Minister of Singapore.

His Majesty The King and Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen were among the world leaders attending the Funeral Services of His Excellency Mr Lee Kuan Yew Singapore's first Prime Minister.

The State Funeral of His Excellency Mr Lee Kuan Yew, who passed away on March 23, was held in Singapore on 29th March. He was widely regarded by Singaporeans and abroad as the father of modern Singapore.

Meanwhile in Bhutan, upon the

INTERVIEWING intelligently!

A reporter could walk up to a famous novelist and ask, “So, what’s your latest book about?” That’s a great question to ruin your interview even before it hits off. You haven’t done your research. You are not ready for the interview.

For a reporter, whose company many hardly appreciate, asking the right questions in that precious little time is vital. So here are a few interview tips that could earn you useful information and quotes worth quoting.

- Preparation is crucial to effective interviewing.
- Act professionally- Call ahead, identify yourself, give the subject an idea of what story you are pursuing
- Don’t be late; in fact arrive early for you might be allowed extra time
- Avoid asking a question a source can answer with yes or no.
- Sound conversational but never engage in conversation
- Control the interview- Don’t sit there and be intimidated, even if you are. Keep your emotions in check.
- Listen but don’t forget to keep your eyes closely on the subject and the environment. At times, that’s where the answers are.
- In difficult situations, show some degree of care. But at some point do your job.
- Do not step in when interviewees pause. Give them time to answer the question.
- Use tape recorder but take notes anyway. Unless you work for a weekly, daily reporters don’t have luxury of time to transcribe each word.
- Write your interview questions so that you won’t forget. But don’t rely on those questions. More important questions are in the answers of your subject. So listen!



- Resist the temptation to converse, sympathize, and add value or meaning to questions
- Know your “must ask” question. If situation turns around and you are given only one question to ask, what would that be?
- Last question- Is it alright if I call you to double-check these quotes or if I have other questions?

“

IF AN INTERVIEW GOES WELL, THEN WE SAY IT’S MAGIC. BUT IT’S NOT MAGIC. IT HAPPENS FOR AN UNDERSTANDABLE REASON. IT’S RATIONAL. IT’S A SKILL. IT’S EASY TO TEACH SOMEONE SKILLS.”

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER
JOHN SAWATSKY
INTERVIEWING EXPERT

Compiled from The Question Man, Susan Paterno,
American Journalism Review.
Modern Media Writing, Rick Wilber and Randy Miller.
Interview tips- David Quin, Thompson Foundation.



NEWS PHOTOS THAT CAUGHT THE EYE



Sipa Chi Dou *Kuensel, January 2015*



Reading week *Bhutan Times, April 2015*



PM cycles through Phuentsholing town *Kuensel, February 2015*



The aftermath of Sarpang fire *Kuensel, February 2015*



The labour minister shows up on the first day of construction of the Hejo bridge which is being undertaken by CDCL *The Journalist, April 2015*



Water woes in Thimphu *Kuensel, April 2015*



CODE OF ETHICS

Section 3. Independence

- A journalist must fulfill his/her professional duties without allowing third parties to interfere.
- Government officials or any other bodies that can alter the contents of journalistic material or impair the independence of journalistic activities must not influence a journalist.
- Journalists are obliged to resist anyone who restricts their independence.
- Publishing material or views under the influence of a third party's private or financial interests is unacceptable.
- Advertisement and editorial materials must be clearly distinguished. To avoid any misinterpretations, an advertisement must be published in an appropriate form or bearing appropriate comments.
- Those working in the editorial departments of a news organisation should not be burdened with financial matters of the organisation should that compromise news contents.
- Journalists will not allow advertising or other commercial considerations to undermine accuracy, fairness or independence, or to influence the nature of new coverage.

Source: IAB

Note: Every edition of the Bhutanese Journalism Review will carry a section from the Code of Ethics, which Journalists Association of Bhutan adopted in September 2014, following a thorough discussion with Bhutanese journalists.

The page is intended to serve as a speed breaker for media practitioners, who run after big stories.

Partner with BMF and donate today to help build strong and independent media.

The Foundation is exempted from taxes and duties, therefore, any donation in kind or cash is tax-deductible.

Contact us at bmf@bmf.bt



About BMF

Working towards vibrant democracy with responsible, independent media.

Bhutan Media Foundation was established through a Royal Charter issued on February 21, 2010, to foster the growth of a strong, responsible media, capable of playing an important role in the social, economic and political growth of the nation. It is mandated to support the development of mass media for it to carry out its roles and responsibilities in the interest of the democracy.

The Foundation is expected to support the media in enhancing skills through scholarships, internships and training, strengthening media executive management and leadership skills. It will also support sustainability and growth of newspapers and broadcast stations, journalists associations and press clubs. It will further invest in the future readership of the print media by striving to provide subscription grants of all newspapers to the schools and colleges in the country. In addition, it will assist in promoting the national language and civic education programs in the media. All licensed mainstream media agencies (newspapers and broadcast stations) in operation are eligible for membership.

A JOURNALIST
IS SOMEONE WHO IS WILLING
TO DISAPPOINT HIMSELF WITH
...THE QUALITY **THE TRUTH**
CONTROL FOR **TO INFORM AND**
INFORMATION **ENLIGHTEN; TO**
EXPAND AND
DIALOGUE; PROVOKE;
TO STIMULATE AND
ENGAGE TO SHOW
THE WAY OR
PRESENT ANOTHER
...ABOUT ADDRESSING
WHAT'S TRUE AND
WHAT'S FALSE
FOR TELLING THE
TRUTH OF OURSELVES
TO OURSELVES



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