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INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION TO ASSIST DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION  
MEDIA IN LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Report by the Acting Director-General of UNESCO

REPORT OF THE MEETING ON DEVELOPMENT OF NEWS AGENCIES  
IN ASIA AND THE FAR EAST 1/

(Summary)

INTRODUCTION

1. The Meeting on Development of News Agencies in Asia and the Far East was held in Bangkok from 19 to 22 December 1961 and unanimously adopted a report which is summarized below.
2. The meeting was attended by national news agency executives or other press experts from fourteen Member States of UNESCO in Asia and the Far East - Afghanistan, Ceylon, Republic of China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Republic of Korea, Federation of Malaya, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Republic of Viet-Nam. Also participating were observers from the world news agencies of France, the USSR, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, as well as observers from a number of Member States and international organizations.

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1/ UNESCO will submit a further report concerning the Meeting on Development of Information Media in Africa (Paris, 24 January - 6 February 1962), which will be issued as E/CN.4/820/Add.2.

3. Chairman of the meeting was Mr. K.N. Ramanathan, general manager of the Press Trust of India.
4. The meeting had been convened at the suggestion of the preceding meeting, also held in Bangkok in January 1960, to draw up a programme on development of the information media in Asia. The 1960 meeting had been the first of three regional conferences convened by UNESCO as part of a survey requested by the Economic and Social Council on the problems of helping the less developed countries to build up their information media.
5. In adopting its report, the present meeting noted with satisfaction that the United Nations had already recommended that assistance be given to developing and strengthening the information media, and it hoped that such aid could be effectively applied to the development of national news agencies in Asia and the Far East.

## DEVELOPMENT OF NEWS AGENCIES

### PROBLEMS AND PROPOSALS

#### The Present Situation

6. Participants emphasized the importance of establishing and expanding news agencies as vital to any programme for general development of the information media. They pointed out that news agencies were a basic source of material for newspapers, radio broadcasting and television; they also recalled the key role of the mass media in helping to raise the educational, cultural and economic levels of developing countries.

7. It was noted that, within Asia, national news agencies existed in most countries while there were none in others. Among the existing agencies, all stages of development were represented, from rudimentary services to some of the best equipped and most efficient news agencies in the world. Most, however, were limited in scope, and their further expansion was limited by deficiencies in financial resources, equipment and experienced staff, by inadequate telecommunication facilities and by the lack of a well-developed national press. Development of the press was, in turn, hampered by low levels of literacy and purchasing power.

8. Asian news agencies considered that their primary function was the collection and distribution of news within their own boundaries. In collecting this news, they usually depended little on their member newspapers or subscribers, but maintained their own separate sources. Some agencies subscribed to the services of one or more of the world news agencies and passed on news from these agencies to their own clients. At the same time, they usually provided the world agencies to which they subscribed with their own national news files.

9. The meeting dealt with the expansion of existing national news agencies, the establishment of news agencies in countries lacking them and the wider exchange of news within Asia and between Asia and the rest of the world. In the light of the discussion, the meeting suggested ways in which the news agencies, in co-operation with international organizations, governments and other interested groups, might encourage the development of national news agencies in Asia. Major points in the discussion of each problem are given below, together with proposals for action to deal with it.

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Exchange of News Services within Asia

10. Noting that certain Asian news agencies had already arranged for the reciprocal exchange of news files, the meeting considered various suggestions for extending and improving news exchanges and for developing other forms of co-operation among news agencies in the region. Direct exchanges were particularly useful because they provided a fuller account of Asian events than was feasible for the world agencies to carry, or included items of strictly regional interest which the world agencies omitted. In addition, direct exchanges stimulated a co-operative spirit among the agencies concerned and made more Asian news available for radio broadcasting.

11. The meeting suggested that Asian news agencies might keep in view, for possible future action, a proposal that they jointly establish, at some major communication centre such as Singapore, a "technical liaison office" to receive and relay summarized news dispatched by them. Noting that the airlines had in recent years jointly leased circuits for the transmission of operational information, the meeting considered that the press might similarly benefit from the joint hiring and use of facilities.

12. Proposal. Existing national news agencies and government information departments in countries where national agencies do not yet operate might promote the reciprocal exchange of news, free of charge. This could include, as a first step, the airmailed exchange of news roundups, as well as feature articles on political, economic, social and cultural subjects.

Exchange of Correspondents

13. The exchange of correspondents among Asian news agencies was endorsed as a practical form of inter-agency co-operation, and one which could promote considerably a wider knowledge of intra-regional problems as well as understanding between Asian peoples.

14. Participants noted that press correspondents often experienced difficulties and delays in obtaining visas for certain Asian countries when travelling on duty. Another problem was that correspondents sometimes suffered discrimination in seeking access to normal sources of information.

15. Proposals. Asian news agencies might promote the exchange of correspondents on a bilateral basis, with the receiving agency paying the correspondent's expenses - an arrangement which would overcome foreign exchange difficulties.
16. National and world news agencies operating in Asia might jointly promote the movement of Asian correspondents in Asia and abroad. In addition, the International Air Transport Association might be urged to provide rate concessions to Asian correspondents for travel on assignments.
17. Governments might consider means of simplifying visa requirements for correspondents. In addition, correspondents should be assured access to normal sources of news without discrimination.

#### Exchange of Feature Services

18. Most of the feature services available in Asia, the meeting noted, were furnished by the world agencies. While some of these services provided features which were consistently high in interest, others often treated subjects that had little appeal for Asian audiences. Some attempts to exchange features had been made by Asian agencies, but none had gone very far.
19. Yet the judicious use of features by the Asian press could fill many needs, particularly the growing demand among newly independent peoples for "background" information about the main currents of life beyond their own frontiers.
20. In addition, the tendency among Asians to buy newspapers rather than magazines or books, which for many were too expensive, gave newspapers wide scope for the use of informative, educational and other background material. The rapid extension of literacy, furthermore, would increase the audience for well-chosen, well-written features.
21. Proposals. National news agencies of Asia might promote the exchange of feature articles on social, cultural, political and other subjects of interest to Asian readers.
22. Reporters for Asian newspaper subscribers to Asian agencies might be enlisted as a source for feature material. Subsequently, this arrangement might be extended to cover countries in other regions.

23. Training for feature writers and editors might be provided through occasional seminars. In addition, experienced feature writers might be provided, possibly with international assistance, to train news agency men in feature writing.

24. World news agencies operating feature services in Asia might help Asian agencies to develop their feature services by promoting an exchange of staff members.

#### Exchange of Photo Services

25. It was noted that the exchange or sale of press photos between Asian news agencies had not been widely developed. Such exchanges had been hindered by the cost of making, distributing and using photos, by high customs charges and by delays due to governmental restrictions.

26. Nevertheless, it was considered that the flow of photos might be improved by combining the exchange of photos and feature material. Such exchanges might be conducted through a pool or central bureau. Several participating news agency experts, as well as government information officers attending the meeting, expressed interest in contributing photos to such a pool.

27. Participants also emphasized that any successful exchange programme must be based on effective national services. It was essential to train photo editors for each agency, as well as for the proposed exchange service.

28. Proposals. Asian news agencies might establish a pool or central bureau for the exchange, free of charge, of photos, news and feature articles. The pool would also handle exchanges with sales to agencies outside the pool.

29. Training for photo editors might be provided, possibly with international assistance, at centres where photo journalism is highly developed.

30. Governments might consider exempting news photos from import duties and airlines might grant them reduced air freight rates.

#### Exchanges between Asia and other Regions

31. Although the exchange of news between Asia and other regions was chiefly carried out by the world agencies, the national agencies played a significant part. Some had their own correspondents in non-Asian countries, some sent news transmissions to non-Asian countries, and some provided national news to the

world agencies for distribution to such countries. It was noted that some non-Asian countries - particularly those of Africa - had expressed interest in receiving Asian news direct and would welcome exchange agreements with Asian agencies.

32. The world agencies declared their willingness to co-operate fully with the Asian national agencies. They did not feel that national agencies were competitive with the world bodies and believed that the stronger they became, the greater would be the flow of news, to the benefit of all.

33. Proposals. The world agencies might extend to additional Asian countries agreements for news exchanges with national agencies.

34. Asian national agencies might initiate direct exchanges with national agencies in other regions, e.g. Africa.

35. Asian agencies wishing to beam newscasts to another region, e.g. Africa, might consider using a common relay point in that region so as to reduce costs and secure a wider audience.

36. Asian agencies might exchange correspondents with national agencies in other regions. They might also consider the pooling of Asian correspondents now assigned to the same countries outside Asia, so as to reduce costs and save manpower.

#### Summarized News Service for the Rural Press

37. Since the basis of any national agency was a well-developed press, assistance should be given to the expansion of newspapers in rural and other areas where they were lacking or few in number. Most rural newspapers could not afford the services of the world agencies and many did not in fact subscribe to the national agencies in their own countries. The meeting noted that certain national agencies were endeavouring to overcome this problem by supplying a special, low-cost service to such newspapers.

38. Proposal. Asian agencies which are not already doing so might attempt to provide a summarized service of national and world news, at low cost, to small and newly established newspapers, particularly during their first years of operation. The service might be transmitted at regular times by telegraph,

teleprinter, radio or airmail and might include bulletins translated into local languages. Governments could assist by granting the service special transmission concessions, in the way of rates and facilities.

#### Staff Training

39. The meeting observed that the training of staff was a continuing problem even in countries where national agencies were fairly well developed and was an acute problem in countries wishing to establish a national agency. Co-operation between existing agencies, world and national, could be especially helpful in this field. International aid could also play a part.

40. The world agencies stated that they were prepared to extend their present practice of giving national agency staff a period of training in their newsrooms but stressed that experienced men should be selected, so as to obtain full value for the arrangement. Offers of assistance were also made by the Colombo Plan and the International Press Institute.

41. Proposals. National agency staff might be given training at more advanced agencies inside and outside the region. For this purpose, fellowships might be granted through the United Nations Technical Assistance Programme, as well as through bilateral inter-governmental programmes, private foundations and professional organizations.

42. News agency staff from other countries might be engaged to train local personnel and help news agency development generally.

#### Communications

43. The meeting emphasized that the flow of news both within Asia and between Asia and other regions depended on the availability of adequate telecommunication facilities and reasonable rates for the dispatch of press messages. However, national and world agencies alike were handicapped throughout most of Asia by inadequate services and high or disparate charges. In addition, certain countries imposed technical limitations on the use of facilities by the press.

44. Meanwhile, it had become evident that there was little possibility of securing new, generally applicable concessions through government action at international conferences. The meeting therefore concluded that, for the



immediate future, the most practical approach would be for governments of Asia to take action on a bilateral or regional basis and for the news agencies to seek better operating conditions and lower rates by pooling their transmission needs. In addition, governments might recognize the special needs of the press in the telecommunication field and to give priority to the improvement of telecommunication services.

45. Proposals. Asian information enterprises might make known to their governments and telecommunication authorities the facilities they need for the effective transmission of news. Conversely, information enterprises might well be consulted in the implementation of the Asian telecommunication network being planned jointly by the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East and the International Telecommunication Union.

46. Governments of the region might take the following measures, in consultation where necessary with the International Telecommunication Union:

- (a) the reduction of rates for the leasing of teleprinter and telex circuits; the reduction of charges for press messages sent by telegraph, telephone and radio; and the conclusion of bilateral or multilateral agreements for the establishment of lower and more uniform rates;
- (b) the provision of scheduled radiocommunication services, with the news agencies leasing transmitters and receivers, or time on these facilities, at reduced rates;
- (c) granting aid to Asian news agencies in arrangements for the collective use of leased circuits for news transmission.

#### Starting New National Agencies

47. Participants observed that in countries where the press was already well developed, the main problem in starting a news agency was that of management and the availability of capital and communication facilities. In other countries, it would probably be necessary, at the start, to depend rather more on revenue from domestic broadcasting systems. Even then, a news agency might have to seek national or international assistance until such time as the country's expanding press and other media provided the income necessary for financial stability.

48. The offer of the world agencies to assist in the establishment of new agencies, as well as in the expansion of existing ones, was noted with appreciation. The meeting was also gratified to note that UNESCO had tentatively provided for expert missions and fellowships, under the Technical Assistance programme in the 1963-1964 period, to aid news agency development in some thirteen Asian countries, subject to requests from the governments concerned.

49. Proposals. The press of a country might take the initiative in setting up a news agency, if necessary with government co-operation.

50. Rates for subscriptions from newspapers and other media, the main source of news agency revenue, might be linked with the circulation of newspapers and the size of radio audiences. Other sources of revenue could include sales of feature services and photos and specialized bulletin services for commercial, banking and other groups.

51. Experts might be sent, through international assistance, to advise on the establishment and operation of a news agency. Fellowships might also be awarded to enable local journalists to study news agency operations abroad.

Financial assistance

52. The meeting agreed that new and existing national agencies could benefit greatly from the extension of capital aid for development. Such aid might take the form of long-term loans for the purchase of equipment. In the case, however, of smaller agencies with very limited resources, it was hoped that their modest requirements might be met through grants or some form of technical assistance.

53. Proposals. Capital might be sought from United Nations and other inter-governmental agencies, as well as from governmental or private sources, for the establishment and expansion of national agencies.

54. Financial aid might take the form of long-term, low-interest loans which might be used, for example, for the purchase of equipment for receiving and transmitting news, or for photographic apparatus.

Regional Organization

55. It was evident that, in dealing with most of the problems raised by the meeting and set forth in its report, close co-operation among the Asian news agencies would be needed. The formation of an organization to achieve these ends was proposed and received the enthusiastic support alike of participating national agencies, of experts from countries still lacking news agencies, and from the world agencies.

56. The meeting noted that a similar organization, the European Alliance of News Agencies, had been established in Europe a number of years ago and had proved its usefulness in facilitating co-operation between the news agencies of that region.

57. Proposal. The meeting appointed a working group to draft the statutes of an Organization of Asian News Agencies (OANA).

58. It was also decided to take advantage of the presence of representatives of many of the national news agencies in the region to bring the new organization into being. Accordingly, upon the closure of the UNESCO meeting, a Constituent Assembly of the OANA was held at Bangkok on 22 December 1961, attended by the participants in the UNESCO meeting.

59. The aims of the OANA, according to the statutes adopted by the Constituent Assembly, are "to promote professional contact and technical co-operation among the news agencies of Asia in order to further their common interests and to increase the flow of information in the countries of the region. The Organization is established in a spirit free of ideology".

60. The OANA's tasks are to promote co-operation among Asian news agencies in such fields as the exchange of news services, features and photographs; the exchange and pooling of correspondents; the more effective and economical use of telecommunication facilities for the transmission of press messages; the reduction of passport and frontier formalities affecting travel by journalists in Asia; and closer relationships between Asian news agencies and the world agencies for their mutual benefit.

61. The new organization elected the following officers, who constitute its Executive Board:

President: Mr. K.N. Ramanathan, General Manager, Press Trust of India

Vice-Presidents: Mr. Baldomero Olivera, Managing Editor,  
Philippine News Service

Mr. Roy Otake, Executive News Editor,  
Kyodo News Service (Japan)

Mr. Mohammed Basri, Chief of the International  
Department, Antara News Agency (Indonesia)

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