Q4 2022 | Issue #01

KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

ART!CULATE

#01

ADENAUER FELLOWSHIP

KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Media Programme Asia

The KAS Media Programme Asia was established in 1996 to promote a free, responsible and ethical press in the region. We connect leading journalists from all over Asia with one another, with colleagues and partners in Germany as well as other locations in Europe to communicate and exchange ideas. The overarching goal of our work is to promote and support the Asian media institutions and journalists in the development of professional journalistic standards in the region, to support young journalists as best as possible on their way into journalism and to advocate and promote the importance of the media as an integral part of democratic and liberal societies.

The Adenauer Fellowship

The Adenauer Fellowship is a scholarship programme offered by the KAS Media Programme Asia to support journalism education in the region. The KAS Media Programme Asia partners with several educational institutions to offer journalism scholarships in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and the Philippines. Application deadlines will be announced on the website: *adenauer.careers*

@media.programme.asia

@media.programme.asia

@KASMediaAsia

@KASMediaProgrammeAsia

@kas-media-asia

media.singapore@kas.de

kas.de/mediaasia

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Foreword

ARTIQULATE? WHAT?!

Ansgar Graw

Ansgar Graw

Director, Media Programme Asia
Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

Ansgar Graw is the director of the Media Programme Asia at the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation Ltd. in Singapore. The journalist and former TV host has published numerous books on Donald Trump, international affairs and German politics, amongst others, and has a strong focus on business journalism through his work with the German media outlets Die Welt (e.g. as correspondent in Washington D.C.) and The European.

@ansgar.graw
@ansgargraw
@potomaker
linkedin.com/in/ansgargraw/
ansgar.graw@kas.de

Articulation means, according to Merriam Webster, "the action or manner of jointing or interrelating" and "the act of giving utterance or expression". To interact with our peers, we articulate ourselves, every day, countless times. And as journalists, we are the professionals of communication. Articulation is our day-to-day routine, our basic tool, and our most precious passion. Therefore, let's articulate ourselves through this new platform of the Media Programme Asia of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung! We are inviting all of our fellows, the current ones and the alumni, to contribute to this magazine *Artiqulate*. And we may also have important guest authors from time to time. Let *Artiqulate* become our and your signature and a platform to demonstrate your skills.

But why do we write *Artiqulate* in this weird way? Replacing the "c" by a "q" brings "iq" in our title, and we love IQ. It is a good thing. It is not elitist, as some might claim, since every person has an "IQ", that is surely just as individual and different as all human abilities. If we are healthy enough, we have two legs, and that's nice, even if none of us can use them as fast as Usain Bolt or Su Bingtian. We also have two hands even though we are not as gifted in their use as the pianist Lang Lang or the artist Gerhard Richter or, let's say, fraudulent shell players. But it's still good to have them. The same goes for everyone's IQ. It is crucial that we use our given means to the fullest extent. And, on another note, as journalists, we have to be able to articulate ourselves in different media for different audiences with different education levels in a different way. Writing for a scientific magazine requires other means than writing for a tabloid. But since we have to be able to provide information to all parts and levels and members of our societies, both are important.

In this sense: Thank you and a warm welcome to all of our authors of this first *Artiqulate* issue! A warm welcome also extends to all of our readers who might become authors of one of the next issues. Offer us your best articles, reports, essays, commentaries, interviews, must-reads – exciting, authentic, vibrant, and intelligent. Just the fine art of expression and communication. Let's articulate, or even better: let's artiqulate. ■

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At Kalabogi, a village in the Sundarbans Forest, Oindrila (30) poses for a picture with her son. Rising sea levels are making life increasingly difficult for villagers in this area. In 2019, just a year prior to this photo, Oindrila lost her house to intense floods.

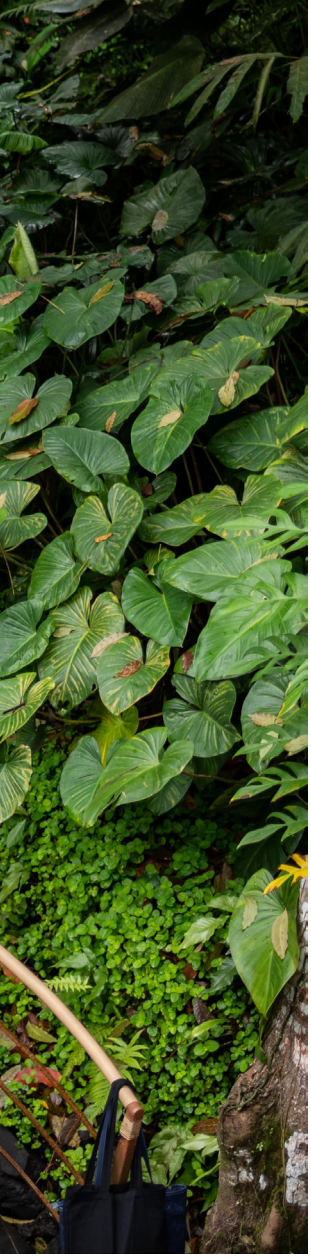
Despite the flooding, studies indicate an estimated 20 million people living along Bangladesh's coast are struggling to find drinking water. In the Sundarbans region, as sea levels rise, the groundwater and the river Satkhira become increasingly saline, which leaves people experiencing intense drinking water shortages during the dry season. Satellites have found the sea advancing by 200 meters a year in parts of the region.

For Oindrila's husband, who used to work as a fisher, the high salinity of the water made it increasingly harder to catch enough fish, forcing him to abandon his job, and move to the city of Khulna to work as a rickshaw driver. A 2016 World Bank report suggests the effects of climate change will only continue to pose threats to the people of Sundarbans in the form of rising sea levels, and frequent, intense storms.

Climate change near the Sundarbans Forest
by K M Asad

#AMLA2022

NOVEL PERSPECTIVES IN THE NEW NORMAL



This year, the Adenauer Media Leaders Academy conference came face-to-face with journalism industry experts and fellows for the first time post-pandemic.

Ara Luna

Scholars and alumni were in for a tropical treat as the annual Adenauer Media Leaders Academy (AMLA) conference took the stage in the picturesque province of Bali in Indonesia last 13–16 September 2022.

With this event, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Media Programme Asia — a German foundation that supports the training of journalists toward a free, ethical, and responsible press — followed through with one of its missions to strengthen the dialogue between media and politics, as well as monitor and highlight current media trends in the region.

The AMLA 2022 marked the first face-to-face conference after two years of meeting online during the pandemic. Using the Komaneka At Bisma hotel's third-floor meeting room as the main discussion ground, the event centered around the theme *Perspectives after the Pandemic: Challenges for the Media in a New Normal.*

Media experts and fellows from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, and the Philippines talked about journalism in the post-pandemic era throughout the two-day conference. The networking event of the Adenauer fellowship also gave participants the chance to catch up with old cohorts and socialize with new colleagues in person.

DAY 1

Participants and speakers at the AMLA 2022 had an early, rousing start to the morning via a welcome spiel by KAS Media Programme Asia director **Ansgar Graw**. His warm opening remarks were followed by Indonesia and Timor-Leste country office head **Dr Denis Suarsana** who expressed excitement that the conference happened in Bali, notably "the most beautiful place in the world", according to him.

The first talk of the event, *What's Next for Journalism?*, was kickstarted by Ateneo De Manila University's Asian Center for Journalism executive director **Luz Rimban**. Concise and straight to the point, she explained the future of journalism in the age of disinformation and the digital landscape, as well as stressed the importance of revisiting journalism standards and practices.

Next on the podium was Singapore-based radio broadcaster and VanMedia Group CEO **Glenn van Zutphen**. His engaging presentation titled *Business Journalism: How to Become an International Journalist* discussed how being clear, concise, and bold are keys to becoming an effective global storyteller. Zutphen also touched on the significance of considering the audience's needs, interests, pain points, and sensitivities when it comes to reporting news that matter to them.

The final speaker of the day was ABS-CBN senior multi-platform journalist **Jacque Manabat**. Her talk *TikTalk: Social Media Hacks for the Modern Journalists* riveted participants and her fellow speakers alike, as she shared how she harnesses the power and influence of TikTok as a news presenter. Manabat started using the platform as an experiment in 2021 and has now grown to be the most followed media personality in Southeast Asia at the short-form video app.

DAY 2

AMLA 2022's second leg started with **Dr Vinod K Jose** presenting ways to overcome challenges and tips to stand out in the new age of media. He currently serves as the executive editor of India-based politics and culture magazine, The Caravan. In **Shahzeb Ahmed Hashim**'s *Journalism as the Second Draft*, the IBA Pakistan's Center for Excellence in Journalism lecturer talked about how journalism is becoming the "second draft of history", the cons of free social media, and why these mediums are democratizing content.

TIME Magazine Person of the Year 2018 and National Geographic photographer-at-large **Shahidul Alam** served as the last AMLA speaker for the year. His talk, *Journalism Experience*, was conducted via Zoom where he told stories about his decades-long work as a renowned Bangladeshi photojournalist who bravely traversed through national disasters. He also answered questions from visual journalism graduate participants about his creative process and photo composition, to name a few.

CONNECTING TOGETHER

Wedged between the scheduled AMLA talks were networking sessions that aimed to bring Adenauer fellows to bond with each other in a meaningful, memorable way.

KAS Media Programme Asia project manager **Lisa Wlaschek** conducted the first session on Day 1. It was called *Past-Pandemic-Future*, where attendees participated in a getting to know each other professionally within five minutes, speed-dating style.

On Day 2, the networking session, *A Booster-Shot for Journalism*, was led by Hashim. He tasked participants to report on climate change using three story elements such as recording a podcast episode.

Both days at the AMLA ended with a half-hour-long open forum that was facilitated by the KAS Media Programme Asia team, Graw and Wlaschek. While this year's networking event was a success, open questions, event feedback, and other remarks were highly encouraged, as the participant responses are crucial to make future conferences better. ■

Ara Luna

Ara Luna is a lifestyle and travel editor in Manila who is currently completing her master's degree in journalism at the Ateneo de Manila University under the KAS Media Programme. Her work appears in Scoot in-flight magazine; Singapore Airlines' member-exclusive digital magazine, PRIORITY; and Cebu Pacific Airlines' online publication, Discover with Smile.

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@arantoinette_

Group photo of the participants, speakers and KAS staff at the Adenauer Media Leaders Aacademy 2022


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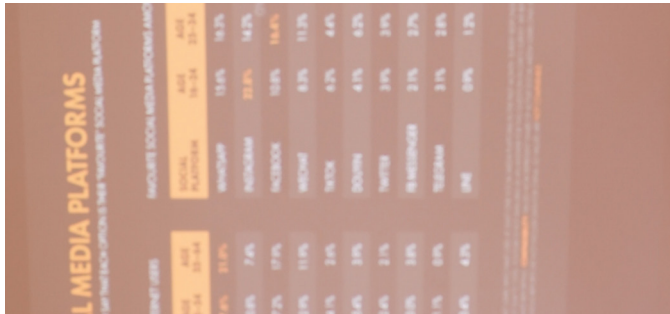
Photos for this article have been provided by **Lisa-Marie David, Alec Corpuz, Gopashis Biswas G.Son, Sukanta Kumar**



FESTIVAL OF FIRE AND FLIGHT

Gopashis Biswas G.Son

A fading afternoon during the Shakrain festival

Such festivals have the ability to give people a break from monotonous and mechanical city life.

The Dhakai version of the traditional Poush Sankranti or Makar Sankranti marking the occasion of the end of Bangla month is known as Shakrain. The tradition dates back over a thousand years. Many believe that this is the day when the Asuras (i.e. the bad) were defeated and banished from earth. Local beliefs also go by stating that on this day the Sun goes to the home of her son, Saturn. Hence the day is significant for the celebration of the father-son relationship.

Hundreds of people gather on different rooftops to celebrate the change of the seasonal cycle through a magnificent display of colours, free spirits and the victory of virtuosity.

On this occasion, the sky of old Dhaka swarms with kites of myriad colours and shapes. Regardless of age, gender or religion, the locals as well as the people from outside gather on the rooftops and participate in exciting kite-fights from morning till sunset. The whole neighbourhood is abuzz with the cheers of people and of kite-fighters raging at each other over foul play, at times. The festivities are not limited to kite flying, though. As the lights start to dim, people start fire-blowing/breathing and light up lanterns along with fire crackers. During this Sankranti, the old Dhaka sky becomes a decorated piece of artwork that displays extravagant fireworks, laser lighting and light balloons. No wonder the local traders earn a mint by selling countless kites, spools and firecrackers. A few years back, the local organizers would rent microphones to play and sing songs all day long. But, as Old Dhaka grew older, the modern booming sound systems and dj-parties had almost shooed away the 'call-ready' microphones as the entire neighbourhood becomes an open-air discotheque charged with youth, dj music, beaming lights and fireworks.

Such festivals have the ability to give people a break from monotonous and mechanical city life. Take a moment to look up into the sky full of kites; these kites have beautiful names like petkhati, chandial, bogga, mombati etc. The years-old traditions, the harmony among people, the kite-fighting and the display of fireworks would surely give anyone enough memories to relish. ■

Gopashis Biswas G.Son

Student, Postgraduate Diploma
of Film and Television, Pathshala
South Asian Media Institute

Gopashis Biswas G. Son is a published freelance photographer, teacher, and researcher based in Bangladesh. His works have been displayed in international exhibitions worldwide and have bagged awards from the Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique, the Royal Photographic Society, the Global Photographic Union, the Bangladesh Photographic Society, and many more. In his current projects, he focuses on climate change and minority rights.

@PhotographyByGsonBiswas
@gson_biswas
linkedin.com/in/gb-gson
gsonbiswas.wordpress.com
iso.gson@gmail.com

Gopashis Biswas G.Son

THE FESTIVAL OF COLOURS

"Colour! What a deep and mysterious language, the language of dreams."
Paul Gaugin

Life is but myriads of mysteries and just like the great French post-impressionist said that colour is the enigmatic lingo — then life must be a concocted conundrum of colours. We as humans see the world in colours, we live, dream, and imagine in colours, and most importantly, we express ourselves in colours as well - be that blue, black, yellow, or a hundred shades of grey. Since colours have been an integral part of our existence, the idea of celebrations of and with colours has always been there. Holi is one such vivid vibrant idea that transpired to become one of the most fascinating festivals in the world, long before the use of water guns, balloons, colour sprays, pumps and pichkaris. Holi, otherwise known as the festival of colours, is the celebration of the triumph of virtue over maleficence — thus, it is a celebration of life itself. It celebrates love, life, passion, and positivity.

Even though the festival has its roots in Hindu mythology, the festivity still tinges a few places in Muslim-majoritarian Bangladesh. But due to its embracing exuberance, people regardless of their caste and creed indulge in the festival on the streets of Old Dhaka by forgetting all the troubles and turmoil of life. With the spirit of spring at heart, people rejoice with utmost fervour and enthusiasm as they apply, blow, throw, and splash colour bombs to each other's faces. As I entered to take photos on that day, I was welcomed with a shower from above and I looked up to see some children on the rooftop mischievously smiling at me. This ritual of playing with colours has also found its home in many Muslim weddings as this can take the celebration to the next level. And likewise, even though it is primarily celebrated in South Asia, it has spread across different parts of the world in some form to celebrate the blossoming of love and the change of season at the end of winter.

The idea of celebrations of and with colours has always been there. Holi is one such vivid vibrant idea that transpired to become one of the most fascinating festivals in the world.

Holi is one of the most ancient festivals with cultural rituals which was also known as 'Holika' in some parts of South Asia. According to the Puranas (one of the Hindu religious texts) and the seminal poet Kalidasa, the oldest mention of the festival can be found in the 4th century during the reign of Chandragupta II. Under the Mughal empire, Holi was celebrated as 'Id-e-Gulabi' or 'Aab-e-Pashi' which means a cascade of colourful flowers. As the full moon spreads its radiance to mark the end of winter according to the lunisolar calendar which typically falls in either March or late February in the Gregorian calendar, the occasion is observed. According to 17th century Indian literature, it is a festival that celebrates good spring harvests and fertile land. Many Hindus find this an occasion to retune and restore ruptured relationships and to get purgative relief from past emotional impurities. It stems from a Hindu legend of a female demon named Holika and her evil brother Hiranyakashipu who thought himself to be the ultimate god as he was once granted a wish by the Lord Brahma (the Hindu God of creation) due to his great devotion to the past. He became invincible by the blessing as no man, animal or weapon could kill him as per his wish. It soon made him arrogant as well and he ordered his people to worship him instead of God. His son, Prahlad who had faith in his heart and was an assiduous devotee of Lord Vishnu (the Hindu God to preserve and protect the universe) and as such, he refused to worship his father. Upon seeing such 'audacity,' the kind along with his sister plotted to kill Prahlad but each time they failed as Lord Vishnu came as a protector to save His devotee. The story ends as Vishnu comes as an avatar named Narasimha in the form of half-man and half-lion to bestow the blessing of Lord Brahma and save mankind from the evil siblings — Hiranyakashipu and Holika. People started celebrating Holi which evolved from the destruction of the demon Holika and thus represents the victory of virtuous force over malevolent force. According to some historians, the part about applying and throwing colours at each other is based on a different myth. As the Hindu God Krishna who has blue skin was unhappy with his colour, his mother suggests that he paints his beloved blue. This leads to the colourful powder celebration which also epitomizes the celebration of love and unity.

Across many parts of South Asia, the festival begins with a bonfire of a puppet of Holika or a piece of wood or two to symbolize the burning of the evil force. This fire also represents the fire of faith from which the devotee of Lord Vishnu once came out safe. The ritual is known as "Holika Dahan" which translates as the bonfire of malevolence. To add more jubilance to the festive mood, special sweets named 'gujiya' and traditional drinks like 'bhang' are prepared. Each of the colours carries a distinct meaning, red symbolizing love and fertility and yellow representing positivity and also the natural agents of remedy. The colour green is for a new life or a new beginning, while blue represents the Hindu God Krishna referring back to the second mythological story.

As Covid-19 hit its blow, the festivities and rituals of the festival were restrained to residences for the past two years. The celebration sparked more colours this year than the past two occasions but still amid Covid restrictions and government-held safety measures. The festival partakers await a new dawn, a new beginning — await a new spring when they could colour up, cheer up and roam around freely in a world free of Covid-19. ■

Gopashis Biswas G.Son

Student, Postgraduate Diploma of Film and Television, Pathshala South Asian Media Institute

@PhotographyByGsonBiswas

@gson_biswas

linkedin.com/in/gb-gson

gsonbiswas.wordpress.com

iso.gson@gmail.com

DEADLY SUPERSTITIONS

In Nepal's mountains old sentiments and new disadvantages are keeping the faith in witches alive. For accused women, the consequences can be fatal.

Nabin Baral

Witch accusations and persecutions continue to be a serious form of gender-based violence in the 21st century in Nepal. Centuries-old superstitious beliefs are deep-rooted in the social and cultural structures of society. Beliefs in witchcraft often lead to physical and psychological violence. Most of the victims are poor, single or marginalized women who live in rural environments.Particularly in Dalit.

One example of superstition's prevalence is the Ghost Festival. It takes place annually on the banks of the Kamala River, in the Dhanusha and Siraha districts of Nepal. Thousands of pilgrims are visiting accompanied by their dhamis(shamans), who claim to have the power to eradicate misfortunes such as failing crops, illness, or family difficulties.

Shamans called jhakaris or dhamis are traditional healers who are believed to cure sickness caused by evil spirits, thanks to their ability to communicate with spirits and gods. They practice exorcism and chant magical incantations, and in some cases use traditional herbs and medicinal techniques to cure those who visit them. Some shamans refer their patients to doctors if they see that the sickness needs modern medical treatment.

However, many shamans also resort to violent exorcism and are responsible for identifying someone as a witch. This happens particularly often in Nepali villages with limited access to modern healthcare facilities, causing hurt, trauma or loss of life.

In the region superstitious beliefs correlate with structural injustices, such as gender discrimination, access to health services, education, economic opportunities and legal advice.

The Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC) Nepal, a non-governmental organization working for the protection and promotion of human rights, documented 236 cases of witch accusation with physical assault between 2016 and 2020. Amongst the documented cases were five cases that led to deaths. Because of a lack of knowledge, education, and power structures many such cases remain undocumented in Nepal.

Nabin Baral

Alumni, Diploma in Photojournalism,
Asian Center for Journalism

Nabin Baral is a documentary photographer and visual storyteller based in Kathmandu, Nepal. His work focuses on the environment, mountains, Nepali people, and social issues. Nabin is a recipient of the "Artist Grant 2020" provided by the British Council in Nepal. In 2016, his photo work "Victim of Superstition" was awarded the first prize in Nepal's biggest photo contest organized by the Photojournalist Club Nepal, in the category "Photo Story".

@nabinphotos
@nabinphotos
nabinbaral.com
nabinphotos@gmail.com

While the cultural elements of shamanic practice are precious, it is even more important to raise awareness of unethical practices among shamans in order to eradicate violence, witch accusations and persecution.

This photo essay illustrates this dire need to raise awareness both, at the grassroots and at the national level. It documents the situations of the accused women and shows that things need to change. It was inspired by the news of Parbati Devi Chaudhary's death who was beaten to death by a group of neighbors in the remote village of Supauli, in the Parsa district of Nepal.

At the time of my visit, the daughter of the killed woman, Rajpati Devi Chaudhary, was still living in isolation and terror in the village. ■

Due to the portrayal and nature in which violence is represented in the series, the KAS Media Programme Asia decided to display only a selection of photographs which the photographer sent in his submission.

Rinku Yadav, 20, is believed to be possessed by an evil spirit. Dhami Paltan Mukhiya is "healing" her during the Ghost Festival in Kamala River. Dhanusha, Nepal.

On 20. March 2009, Kalli Kumari B. K., a 50 year-old Dalit woman, was accused of practicing witchcraft by a group of villagers that was led by the local school's headmistress. She was beaten and forced to eat her own excreta in public. "I accepted that I am witch when they took blades out to chop my breasts. I had no other choice at that time". She remembers the days as black day of her life. Lalitpur, Nepal.

Pampha Maggriti, 30, a Dalit woman, was severely beaten when she tried to help another woman, Chanamati Maggrati, who was accused of being a witch and was attacked by her neighbor. Dhading, Nepal.

Sunkesi Chaudhary shows a photo of her mother, Parvati Devi Chaudhary, who was beaten to death at midnight on 16 August 2013. She was 45 years old. That night, Parbati and three other women were identified as witches by a dhami that a a neighbor had brought in to the village. Supauli, Parsa, Nepal.

CONVINCE WITH EMPATHY

How to Maintain Credibility by Attracting Audience in the World of Breaking News

Adrija Saha

With the advance of the Internet and other technologies in modern society, there is a new age of information relation. Since there is no longer the need to wait for next day's newspaper, as news from all over the globe is available at the fingertips of a person within hours or even minutes of the event. One of the major reasons for this change is the technological advancement within the media industry. Hence, monitoring this information revolution along with the generational shift of consuming news and other information through mobile devices has become a necessity.

However, the fundamental bond shared between a journalist and the communities they serve has not changed. In fact, trust and accountability have become even more important today. With information so easily available and accessible, the challenge remains for media houses to maintain credibility and authenticity of their reportage.

Challenges come not only in terms of a strong economic standing, (due to a steady decline in the sales of newspapers all over the world), but also in terms of credibility. Today, regardless of which medium is used to deliver a story, the legacy or the credibility of a story is questioned more than ever before. This is happening mainly due to the increasing reports of stories with weak sourcing and also cases where the journalists being caught at "becoming the story" rather than reporting it happening.

The 24-hours news cycle or the need of producing informative content at a greater speed than ever before is also turning out to be major challenge. With time becoming the ultimate enemy and editors, writers as well as producers being under pressure of producing more content in a shorter span of time, the challenge of maintaining credibility has become even more critical. Whether it is an online media platform trying to provide information on a timely basis or a newspaper trying to analyse a particular event by giving it a fresh perspective, the key to success is transparency and credibility. However, with increasing 'clickbait' journalism, the credibility of the story is even more questioned.

There is also an upcoming challenge in the area of platform responsibility or the 'trust' factor between a media organisation and their readers or viewers. Today, we tend to be more mobile in terms of changing our jobs, changing a news channel as well as buying a

newspaper. Therefore, with the decreasing attention span of the audience, and increasing options of news consuming platforms, trust is required more than ever before.

The media industry has become saturated and highly competitive, hence, the amount of time people spent reading or viewing content is directly linked to the financial economy. This situation is termed 'attention economy'. At the same time reports also suggests that the trust factor regarding traditional media is declining as well, as even they are facing increasing challenges from media outlets brought in due to the advancement of technology.

A 2017 survey by Reuters for one of its digital news projects showed that the trust in media in the United Kingdom has fallen to almost eight percent in a year. According to Edelman's annual report on trust, it is found that institutions of government, NGOs and media are trusted less around the world, with the greatest drop in media. The situation is unfortunate as a lot of people tend to take advantage of it, especially politicians. Politicians now use the label of 'fake news' to undermine the legitimacy of an established media outlet, especially during elections.

However, apart from the above-mentioned challenges, the media industry is often accused of a lack of representation of minorities as well as racial ethnic groups. This is also a reason why the traditional media is facing a loss of trust among its young readers and viewers. In the case of the media in India, inspite of its growth in the business in the last few years, the lack of diversity is clearly visible. Various surveys also point out that minority communities in India do face a lack of representation in the mainstream media outlets in India. A survey conducted by News Laundry (an Indian news web portal) and reported by Reuters showed that only five percent of the articles written in English language newspapers in India are by people who come from a lower caste. The representation inside the news room is also important. However, this problem is not only limited to media outlets in India, it can be found in many places worldwide.

Equal representation is important because whatever we consume from the media, be it fictional or non- fictional content, it helps us to build our opinions of the real world. The mainstream media has influence over people and helps them to formulate ideas about people outside their own racial or ethnic group, hence, a lack of representation or negative representation of minorities can become harmful in the long run. Diversity in media is important not only to maintain credibility but also because it helps building a more democratic society.

There have been some major changes in the media industry especially in the last five years. We have seen how social media is starting to play a dominant role in terms of becoming a platform for news consumption, and with the invention of Mojo or mobile journalism, everybody can become a news reporter. This as a whole is an additional challenge for media organizations because the collection of news is becoming challenging and maintaining credibility is more difficult. The anonymity of the internet makes verification even more difficult.

The pandemic has forced people and even journalist to work remotely and hence, mobile journalism is becoming the new norm. However, the media industry has its own challenges in keeping up with the advancement of technology. Hence, transparency and accountability are the two things which every media organisation is struggling to maintain in order to achieve platform responsibility. Accountability can be adopted by taking ownership of your story, by mentioning the sources, providing adequate statistics or data available on the topic, and also by providing relatable examples, especially if the author has some personal experience in the matter. These help the reader to connect with the author, and hence, a trust factor which makes the content more credible is built automatically. Weak sourcing is one of the major reasons for lack of trust among news consumers.

With information so easily available and accessible, the challenge remains for media houses to maintain credibility and authenticity of their reportage.

Another measure to gain platform responsibility is to take feedback from the audience. Feedback brings the audience and the organisation closer together and helps them to connect. It also gives the audience an opportunity to speak about what they see and feel. This is a way any media organisation can win back the trust of its audience. For instance; freelancing or citizen journalism can be of major help to a media organisation in terms of producing content at greater speed.

Accepting the errors pointed out by the audience is also a way to make them trust you. Accountability can also be increased by providing hyperlinks in an article. Multiple hyperlinks in an article increase viewership

and also add credibility to the piece of work. Hence, collaborating with one's audience through the facilities of freelancing and citizen journalism can help an organisation not only to gain credibility but also to produce more content in a short span of time.

Today, with the market becoming more and more competitive with every passing day, one must focus more on quality than quantity. Information should be provided with responsibility. Hence, in order to be successful, a journalist must be provided with adequate space and resources in order to come up with quality content. Media organisations like Buzzfeed, are now rethinking their position in the industry and coming up with long form articles, for example like the one written by Azmat Khan on Afghanistan's ghost schools. The article is based on more than 150 interviews, hence adding credibility to the story.

Along with time and financial pressure, the anonymity of a source is something that really limits the credibility of a story. From government officials demanding anonymity even while speaking about known government policies on Instagram and Twitter handles with eggs for profiles, there is an unprecedented amount of content without a name to it. The challenge here is for journalists to be more rigorous with their sourcing while at the same time protecting those whose safety depends on anonymity.

On the flip side of the Internet revolution today there is the direct communication that exists between the journalist and the readers. The social networks, especially Twitter and Facebook, are making news and information content stronger than ever, be it in appreciating or expressing support for a story or by ripping it apart when it's wrong. Today, readers are contributing directly to the media organisations through various media ventures like crowd sourcing, sharing links, but at the same time by also picking up a newspaper every morning.

With social media and direct communication between content producers and the consumers, the choice remains in the hands of the consumer as to which link's they wishes to share or which publication they think is more credible. In a world where information and content is produced and shared and updated every minute, all one can do as a journalist is to maintain ones ethics by being impartial, responsible and independent of commercials and political interests.

However, when an audience speaks about trust in media, what do they mean by it? Are they looking for unbiased factually accurate information or would they rather trust information that mirrors their views, values and life worlds ? That question remains unanswered. ■

On the flip side of the Internet revolution today there is the direct communication that exists between the journalist and the readers.

Adrija Saha

Alumni, Postgraduate Diploma in Integrated Multimedia Journalism, Asian College of Journalism

Adrija Saha is a reporter based in Kolkata, India. Although the focus of her reporting currently lies mainly on breaking news in Kolkata, Adrija's main interests lie in the area of war and conflict. In the future, she aspires to make the transition to become a war correspondent.

@adrija.saha.311
@a_d_r_i_j_a__s_a_h_a
@AdrijaSaha9
linkedin.com/in/adrija-saha-4922a8147
adrijasaha1708@gmail.com

WHO PEELS YOUR GARLIC?

Inside Manila's informal economy

Garlic is a basic ingredient in Filipino cuisine. Before it ends up on peoples' plates it moves through many hands. Most importantly, those of the garlic peelers, who depend on the precarious job that earns them little money.

Geela Garcia

Marites Arendain working at home.

The pungent scent of garlic lingers on Marites Arendain's calloused palms all day. She's had "garlic hands" for years, from hand-peeling kilograms of garlic which are then distributed to markets and large fast-food chains.

This job pays her $1.67 (P83.39) for the sack of garlic she is able to peel each day, a very small fraction of the city's minimum wage ($10.68 or P533.30), only enough to buy her family of eight a kilo of rice and some dried fish.

"Peeling garlic the whole day burns my hands, especially when the garlic is fresh or thick," she said.

There is a robust demand for garlic, a basic ingredient in Filipino cuisine, from small restaurants and large fast-food chains in Manila, the Philippine capital. Baseco, a poor community near the Manila port, is where a lot of that garlic is peeled before it ends up in the boxed meals sold by popular fast-food chains, in tinned corned beef manufactured by leading food companies, or in the fancy dishes of luxury hotels.

Sacks of peeled garlic from a block in Baseco.

Arendain is one of the hundreds of mothers in Baseco who are part of the shadow garlic economy. For mothers like her, home-based work, despite the long hours and meager income, allows them to care for children while also making some money to put food on the table.

The garlic supply chain

Arendain works inside her home where she stands knee-deep in floodwater during heavy rains. "I get up at 2 am to submerge the garlic in drums filled with water to soften the cloves while preparing my small sari-sari (convenience) store," she said.

She spends the rest of the morning holding a clove of garlic with her left hand and a flimsy cutter with her right. It takes her eight hours to peel a 15-kilogram sack of garlic; typically a few hours in the morning, afternoon, and evening that she can squeeze in between other chores.

"By noon, I start arranging the newly delivered sack while doing household chores. I sleep at 11 pm because I still have to watch over my kids," she said.

Most of Baseco's residents are migrant workers from the provinces who sought better-paying jobs in the capital.

They live in makeshift shelters covered by thin, iron sheets that provide little protection from the rain and wind during typhoon season. In summer, these homes, which are packed close to each other, often provide tinder for the fires that regularly raze the community.

Baseco's proximity to the port, where garlic shipments land, made it a convenient hub for garlic distributors. The exact number of peelers is not known, but a former distributor estimated that garlic peeling takes place in 10 of Baseco's 39 blocks, with around 20 families from each block involved in peeling.

Arendain initially wanted to work at a restaurant or a department store where the pay is higher and the working conditions are better, but her husband, a construction worker who lives on job sites, discouraged her from working because nobody would take care of their six children.

Her husband makes the minimum wage of $11 (P549.22) a day, and that along with her income barely suffices. In 2018, the government put the poverty threshold – what a family of five needs to provide for the basics including food, shelter, transportation, and clothing – at $208 (P10,385.41) a month. But Ibon Foundation, an independent think tank, estimated the family living wage at more than double the poverty threshold and said a family must earn $499 (P24,915.52) per month to survive. The couple's total monthly income only amounts to two-thirds of that.

"I let my kids sleep until noon, I don't wake them up in the morning because we can't afford to buy breakfast," Arendain said.

Women like Arendain are usually the ones involved in this business.

Most of the garlic in the Philippines is imported from China, the world's largest garlic producer. Much of that garlic is smuggled into the country.

A 2014 Philippine Daily Inquirer report cited estimates, based on figures from the United Nations Comtrade, that more than half of the Chinese garlic that makes it to the Philippines is smuggled.

The Philippines were 100% self-sufficient in garlic until the 1990s. But the influx of cheap Chinese imports has decimated local garlic production. "According to 2016 data, China is the top producing country with the highest yield of 26.79 mt/ha (metric tons per hectare). In comparison, the Philippines' yield was 2.82 mt/ha. Filipino farmers are far from being competitive in terms of cost competitiveness and productivity," said the Department of Agriculture.

A garlic distributor in Baseco who asked not to be named said that they rarely buy local garlic since prices reach up to $6 (P299.59) per kilogram. "Local garlic smells and tastes better, but they can't compete with China's prices, which are sold at $2.5 (P124.83) per kilogram," he said.

The garlic the Baseco women peel ends up with wholesalers at the night market in Divisoria, where it is bought by public markets and restaurants, the

At a glance

- The garlic peeling industry in Baseco, Manila, places Filipino women among the least visible, worst paid, and most dispensable part of the informal economy.
- The worsening job crisis brought about by the pandemic has forced more Filipino women to resort to home-based work despite poverty wages and on top of the unpaid care work they do for their families.
- Figures show a rise in low-wage jobs, yet the bill aiming to protect informal workers has been pending in a legislative committee since December 2019.

Some use a makeshift rubber buffer to prevent themselves from getting cuts.

distributor said. He explained that large companies procure tons of garlic from third-party suppliers or concessionaires who in turn get their supply from small distributors like him who subcontract the garlic peeling to the Baseco women.

Jollibee, the country's largest fast-food chain, famous for its burgers and fried chicken, gets its garlic from third-party suppliers, said a former employee in the company's supply chain department. "It's up to the supplier whether they will hire someone else to peel it," she said.

Increasing informal work due to lack of rural development

"I was a landless sweet potato farmer in Masbate, earning $1.5 (P74.90) a day for clearing hectares of lands of my neighbors using a knife," Arendain recounted.

Her family left their village in southern Luzon, the largest of the Philippine islands, in search of better opportunities in the capital. But job options were limited so they, like the other Baseco families, became workers in the informal sector.

Home-based workers like Arendain should be covered by the Labor Code, but little to non-existing governance of this sector means it is largely unregulated and in the shadows of the formal economy.

According to the Department of Labor and Employment, 2020 data says that out of the 39.4 million employed Filipinos, 13.6 million are informal workers.

Protection for workers

Senator Risa Hontiveros is one of those behind a proposed Magna Carta of Workers in the Informal Economy, which would have the government keep track of the shadow economy and make sure informal workers are protected.

"They are not yet well-represented in the old medium-term Philippine development plans, and for them to be counted, we would start by entering them in the database. Because how could we plan for sectors that are rendered invisible if there are gaps in the data?" Hontiveros told the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

She said the proposed law would establish formal rights for self-employed workers, agricultural workers, and home-based workers.

For the garlic peelers, the passing of the bill, which has been stuck in a congressional committee since 2019, could mean better chances to secure a living wage and equal remuneration.

Rosario Guzman, the executive editor of Ibon Foundation, said that the number of informal workers was growing even before the pandemic, and argued for long-term solutions to address the issue.

"The increasing number of informal workers is telling of a deep-seated problem in an economy that can't create meaningful jobs or jobs that produce products or basic commodities," she said, adding that a long-term solution could be a shift from a service-oriented economy to an economy that prioritizes agriculture and manufacturing.

"Life was more peaceful in Masbate, water was clean and free, and I had a better home, but we couldn't imagine our future there, as we had no land to call our own," recalled Arendain.

"I barely even had tools to plow the field. It was difficult to earn money, but if only we could support our life back then, then I think we wouldn't even need to find odd jobs in the city."

While garlic peelers can organize to demand just wages, for now, Arendain is grateful to earn while taking care of her children.

She recognizes the value of her work and thinks that she deserves to earn more, but she says that alone and constrained by responsibilities at home, she could only do so much to earn for the next day.

Still, like other garlic peelers in Baseco, Arendain hopes to earn better in the future, but for now, she will continue to peel. – **Rappler.com** ■

*$1= P49.9299

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Geela Garcia

Student, Diploma of Visual Journalism, Asian Center for Journalism

Geela Garcia is a freelance multimedia journalist based in Manila, Philippines. Through her photographic work, which documents stories of women, food sovereignty, and the environment, Geela aims to document history through the experiences of those who write it.

@geelamaryse

@geelamanila

geelagarcia.com

geelamanila@gmail.com

AWAY FROM HOME

Nahid Hasan

Bangladesh is situated in the delta of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna river systems, the largest river delta in the world. More than 160 million people live in the delta of Bangladesh and depend on its distinct landscapes for their living. This delta is highly vulnerable due to river erosion. Across Bangladesh, thousands of families have been rendered homeless because of river erosion. It is estimated that about one million people are affected each year by riverbank erosion. Rivers took away their existence. Their shelter, security, memories, belongings and everything they had is lost. River erosion compels people to migrate or leave their place of origin and destroys the livelihood, cultural heritage, and social fabric of entire communities. Displacement is the instant effect of river erosion. When they are displaced from their place of birth, they are disconnected from their source of income, and other livelihood options, forcing them to take up new livelihood activities. Many of those arriving in city areas end up in the urban slums with rudimentary housing conditions, very high population density, and poor sanitation. Many are again located on the embankment of the river or nearby char villages.

There are about 4 million displaced people in the country who live a floating life. People displaced by river erosion experience extensive socio-economic poverty and marginalization as a result of forced displacement from their place of origin. Victims have been cursed by displacement for a long time. They are never able to build a proper house to protect themselves from erosion. Due to the lack of a stable residence and long-term occupation, a serious identity crisis engulfs the victims. There is no other disaster like river erosion and internally displaced families face various unforeseen difficulties in many states of displacement. The displaced families are gradually sinking into the abyss of uncertainty. Poverty is the utmost outcome of river erosion. River erosion makes poor people poor again and rural poor become urban poor. ■

Nahid Hasan

Alumni, Diploma of Visual Journalism,
Asian Center for Journalism

Nahid Hasan is a documentary photographer, visual journalist, and filmmaker based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. His main interest lie in human rights, and social, cultural, and environmental issues. As a photojournalist, he regularly contributes to BenarNews, Pacific Press Agency, and NurPhoto Agency.

@bohemian.nahid
@nahidimage
nahidimage.wixsite.com/mysite
nahidimage@gmail.com

Momotaz Begum is sitting in the yard of her temporary house on the bank of the river in Barishal district, August 31, 2021. “I will never forget how all our belongings vanished in an instant. There were houses, there was also paddy, but everything was lost in the river erosion. When a house is burnt, ashes remain, but nothing remains in the river erosion.”

Mahinur Begum standing in front of her shelter, lives on the bank of the river in Barishal District, June 17, 2021. “Now we have nothing. The river took away everything except this house. We somehow managed to live in this space with fear. We are living vulnerably. I am worried about coming days.”

Ayub Ali Hawladar standing in front of his makeshift shelter in the coastal area of the Barishal district, September 4, 2021. “My house has been destroyed by river erosion. I had a lot of land but all the land has been taken away by the river. Water comes into my house every day. I have no land anywhere else. Now I do not know where I will go.”

Rongila standing on the bank of the river in Barishal district, September 4, 2021. “All my land is washed away by river erosion. I am very unlucky, I have no son, I have no husband, I am a widow. Everything is taken by the river, there is no place to go. There is no place to bury me after I die.”

Kajol Hawlader standing on the bank of the river in the Barishal district, June 17, 2021. “I lost everything that was created by my father and grandfather to river erosion. Many from my village have gone to other places. Now I do not know where I will go. I am in a lot of trouble with my family. God knows what will happen.”

Shajahan standing on the bank of the river in Barishal district, September 4, 2021. “All of my land is washed away by river erosion. I used to earn some money and run my family. My earnings have been hampered by river erosion. I don’t sleep for the fear that anytime my house may be taken by the river.”

WATER, A CONSTANT WORRY

Monon Muntaka

Monon Muntaka

Alumni, Diploma of Visual Journalism,
Asian Center for Journalism

Monon Muntaka is a freelance journalist based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Due to experiences in her early life that showed her the importance of human and women's rights, Monon has made it her mission to unfold diverse stories on various social concerns around her. Currently, her work focuses on trauma from sexual, emotional, and physical abuse.

@monon.muntaka
@mononmuntaka
linkedin.com/in/monon-muntaka-shova-723523143
mononmuntakashova.wordpress.com
mononmuntaka16@gmail.com

There are about 40 Bihari refugee camps in Dhaka city, the capital of Bangladesh, the country became independent in the 1971 war against Pakistan. These camps are called "stranded Pakistani camps" or "stranded refugee camps". Not only Pakistanis but many Indians from Bihar state & other cities live here.

The living conditions for the Biharis in the camps are poor. Housing is cramped and dilapidated. Toilets are scarce and often dirty or broken. In many camps, fewer than 10 public toilets service hundreds of residents. In a few areas, there is no regular supply of water, drinking water is available but unclean. There are no playgrounds or green spaces. Camp roads are narrow, crumbling, and flood easily.

Among all the problems, getting clean water is the biggest one. "Rather than life and future we have a constant worry about water", shared Khairun Imran (50). Khairun is a widow, she has one son. She and her son live in Geneva camp. Her son works in a butcher's store, so he is always outside for work. So, Khairun has to collect drinking and cleaning water. Because of her age and illness, carrying water is damaging her health. Now she has a back pain problem too.

Since arriving in the camp, there has been no personal water supply, so they have to collect water far away from their houses from a public space, where 2-3 times they can get the chance to store the water. To collect water, they have to wait in a long queue. Sometimes in the winter, especially kids and old people have to take a shower in the evening or at night in an open place where there is almost no privacy. In future, in their daily lives, rather than getting good food, they would prefer to have a private water connection where they can use the water whenever they want 24 hours a day. ■

Photo by Monon Muntaka

WHERE DO I PEE?

Public toilets are a scarcity in Bangladesh's capital city. The ones that exist are either unusable or overcrowded with men. For Dhaka's women - struggling with thirst, urine infections and harassment - this is an existential crisis.

Monon Muntaka

When you start your morning and get ready to go to work, what is the first thing that crosses your mind? For me, it is always: Where do I pee when I am outside?

This may sound weird, but here where I live, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, it is my reality.

I asked ten female friends of mine — all of them working women — what they think about most during the day. Nine out of ten of them, especially those doing fieldwork, agreed that rather than worrying about work, or family, or other things, their one worry is always: Where do I pee?

But why is this such a concern for women in Bangladesh?

In Dhaka, people now have access to 67 public toilets — a small quantity given the city's population of over 20 million. And even though public toilets are available in Dhaka, usable ones are still few and far between. In 2017, an Action Aid Bangladesh study in collaboration with UK Aid found that more than 90 percent of public toilets in Dhaka are inoperable. While 91.5 percent of the toilets were deemed unsanitary, 96 percent of them were found to be hazardous, and 54 percent lacked sanitation facilities. Some facilities administered by third-party organizations are deemed to be in good condition, but most of them are closed and very far away from each other. As a result, simply put: The megacity stinks. Navigating Dhaka in many areas, even in key locations with five-star hotels, is a miserable experience.

I took it upon myself to visit at least ten public bathrooms in various parts of Dhaka city to see for myself what they were like.

My first stop brought me to Dhaka New Market, where the market authorities run a public bathroom. Upon inspection, I found the bathroom to be dirty and entirely unusable. Another public toilet, located between the National Mosque and the Bangabandhu Stadium, was similarly extremely filthy. The public toilet I found in the district of Jatrabari was not even open.

While researching beforehand on the Dhaka city map, I found four public toilets in the Mohakhali area which made me quite hopeful that they would be more usable. When I went there, however, one of them was closed — the authorities had stopped allowing the facilities there. The second was an open-door system near a vegetable market, meaning the place around it is overcrowded all the time. Clearly this was a bathroom only usable for men.

The third one in Mohakhali was indeed fairly usable, although the shower was broken. The last one I found had such a long queue that after 25 minutes of waiting, I didn't even get the chance to go in. At least some women were able to use it, though.

My next stop was one of the most populated areas of the city. I could not find any public toilets in or around Gulistan. So, no facilities for that area's people.

Next, I went to the Shahbag area which is another one of the most crowded and busiest parts of the city. Students, artists, activists, day laborers — people from almost every profession and class come here. For them, there are only two public toilets available. The first lies behind the flower market and is extremely dark and narrow. The second remains closed most of the time, always after 9pm at night.

Going to the bathroom is clearly not an easy feat. And the many problems that arise from this lack of usable public toilets affect women a lot more than men. None of these already unsanitary public toilets are suited for women to use comfortably. So, they attempt to stay away from public restrooms all together. According to the caretakers of public toilets, only around 25 to 30 women use their restrooms between the peak hours of 2pm to 10pm. In comparison, they

Rather than worrying about work, or family, or other things, their one worry is always: Where do I pee?

see around 200 to 250 men in the same time period. But what do these women do instead? How are they supposed to hold it in for the entire day?

"I try not to use the toilet until it is very necessary. As a result, I consume less water than my body requires", says Suborna Akter Deepti, a student of Fine Arts at Dhaka University. "One has to pay five to ten Taka for using public toilets. For an insolvent woman or a student like myself who does not earn enough money, it is difficult to pay every time I use the toilet. And women cannot use overcrowded toilets frequented by men."

The fee for using the toilets fluctuates between 5 and 15 Taka. Using the toilet to pee or defecate is charged at 5 Taka, and showers are charged at 10 Taka. 10 Taka amounts to around 11 US cents.

Providers should not be able to charge for the use of public toilets. It is technically the government who must cover the costs of maintaining these bathrooms. Instead, one pays for using the public toilets, and doesn't even receive proper facilities, as most of the time there is no water, the shower is broken, and the lock is broken and dirty.

But Suborna is not alone in her experience. As a photojournalist, my work takes place outside; I usually spend more than 10 hours doing fieldwork. As a result, during my workdays, I simply barely drink water. After several years of fieldwork I have learned to survive the day doing this, but there are days when my survival skills can only go so far.

I usually attempt to only use public toilets in emergency situations. One day, I was in exactly one such situation. So, I visited three public toilets: Not one of them I could use. The first one was locked. The second one's commode and flush system were broken. In the third, some men were peeing in their open washroom on my right side, while others were half-naked taking showers on my left. After noticing me, they started teasing me. If I had wanted to use the toilet at that moment, I would have had to cross them to get to the women's toilet at the end of the corner. My search for toilets therefore clearly was not particularly successful.

According to Bhumijo, a social company that strives to improve the quality of public toilets, a survey done in Dhaka between 2016 and 2017 discovered that 80 percent of women avoid drinking water before leaving the house for fear of not finding suitable toilets. The survey also found that Dhaka would need at least 3,000 more toilets by 2020 to serve all of its people. Now, in 2022, that minimum number has not even nearly been reached.

"A hygienic environment inside a toilet is a necessity — particularly for women and children," says Annanya Rahman, a social worker on World Toilet Day in 2021 about Bangladesh. "The Dhaka city corporation has built women-friendly toilets but they are very few in

Figures at a glance

1 **toilet for every 215,000 people** in Dhaka according to a 2015 study of WaterAid

90% **of public toilets** run by the city corporations are not viable due to various factors: Insecurity issues (96%), Lack of facilities (54%), Unhygienic and dirty environment (91.5%)

80% **of women** in Dhaka avoid drinking water before leaving the house as they think there are not enough toilets for women

1+ **times a year** women aged between 26-65 get Urinary Tract Infection attack

47 **active DNCC and DSCC toilets** out of 69 public toilets in Dhaka city

32 **important locations** to get renovated public toilets. The initiative will be taken by Bhumijo at New Market, Farmgate, Moghbazar, Malibagh, Mouchak, Uttara, Mohakhali and Mirpur, among other places

3,000 **toilets** at least will be needed in Dhaka by 2020

* The data is based on the research "Gender Responsive City Structure" conducted by ActionAid Bangladesh in 2017 as well as a survey carried out by Bhumijo from 2016-2017.

number compared to the need. Women often have to go long hours without using the toilet when outside." The World Toilet Day was created by the UN as part of their Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of guaranteeing good sanitation for all by 2030. Their data shows that Bangladesh has a long way to go to fulfill their target.

Sheikj Sabiha Alam has noticed this as well. Sabiha is a senior reporter for Prothom Alo, one of the biggest daily newspapers in Bangladesh based in the Kawran Bazar district in Dhaka. She has been working as a reporter for the last seventeen years with most of her work being in the field.

"A few years back, I assigned an intern to write about public toilets because I really wanted to know what the present situation of public bathrooms was like," Sabiha says. "17 years ago, I had reported on a similar story. The intern visited 25 public toilets from different areas of the city — and nothing had changed."

"I have this nightmare every morning where I wake up to see that I am using a filthy public toilet," she adds. "It horrifies me."

Not only does this affect working women, but also homemakers who maybe don't work outside, but do leave the house for shopping or to take their children to school. Every year, when Junior School Certificates and Secondary School Certificate exams are held, mothers accompanying their children face toilet problems. Near the Hazaribagh Girls high school for example where these exams are held, there are no toilets anywhere, and there is no opportunity to use the available toilets at the bus stand either.

Everyone in Dhaka, rich or poor, working woman, homemaker, or student, has had to hold a full bladder on the road at some time in their lives. This is unavoidable when you live in a city with one toilet for every 215,000 people.

And unfortunately, it does not end at having to hold your bladder — a lack of toilets can be fatal. Doctors routinely warn that delaying urination is one of the major causes of Urinary Tract Infections (UTI) which particularly women are more susceptible to. According to the World Health Organization, poor sanitation is also linked to the transmission of diseases such as cholera, diarrhea, dysentery, hepatitis A, typhoid, and polio.

Dr. Razia Akter has been working as a gynecologist at Dhaka Community Medical College for the last twenty years. For every ten patients she sees, she finds four to five urinary tract infections.

"Almost every woman and girl has a UTI attack at least once a year," Dr. Akter says. "It's happening

because they are not consuming sufficient amounts of water and holding their urine for too long, especially during menstruation."

In my lifetime, I have been admitted to the hospital twice for urine infections. But even without it getting to that point, I experience severe pain in my lower belly at least once or twice a month. Out of ten women I spoke to from different backgrounds and ages, eight women reported experiencing the same.

According to the United Nations, about 35 percent — 2.5 billion of the planet's 7 billion people — live without basic sanitation facilities. One in three women and girls around the world do not have access to basic usable toilets.

Every year, women's participation in Bangladeshi business, corporate, media, and garments is increasing. They are contributing more and more to national revenue and helping our country reach a higher GDP. Even the homemakers are busy with raising the next generation. After all that, when we go outside, we are not able to find a decent toilet that is safe, has water, or is properly cleaned. Toilets in government offices, hospitals, educational institutions, bus stands, and railway stations among public places need to be checked regularly for cleanliness, water supply, and functionality. Adequate safety measures, especially in the women toilets, and proper ventilation must be provided. Is it too much to ask for, to simply be able to pee? ■

Monon Muntaka

Alumni, Diploma of Visual Journalism,
Asian Center for Journalism

@monon.muntaka

@mononmuntaka

linkedin.com/in/monon-muntaka-shova-723523143

mononmuntakashova.wordpress.com

mononmuntaka16@gmail.com

DISASTER DUE TO RIVER EXPLOITATION IN NEPAL

Illegal sand mining on Chure's rivers displaces farmers and decimates the fragile landscape.

Ramu Sapkota

Ramu Sapkota

Alumni, Master of Journalism, Asian Center for Journalism

Ramu Sapkota is an investigative and data journalist from Kathmandu, Nepal. Over the past twelve years, Ramu has produced dozens of investigative stories that have had a great impact on Nepali politics and parliament. His stories cover a variety of topics from public health and medical education, to labor and migration, human rights, and financial crimes.

@ramu.sapkota.946
@ramujourno
@ramusapkota
linkedin.com/in/ramu-sapkota-49786267
rspress.sapkota5@gmail.com

Kantidevi Malar, 40, looks out across her small farm where the top soil has been replaced by sand and boulders brought down by monsoon floods six months ago. The parts where she used to be able to plant are still water-logged.

Her husband's family has been farming this small plot for generations, growing paddy, vegetables and wheat and sharing half the harvest with the landlord.

"What do I do now," she says simply, gesturing at the devastation.

Ramchandra Mahato, 45, is a native of this part of Nepal on the plains bordering India and faces a similar predicament. The floods covered his land under 3m of water, destroyed the standing crops and damaged his house.

Malar and Mahato are just two of the thousands of farming households who have been affected by the raging Ratu River in the Mahottari district. The Ratu is not a river flowing down from Himalayan glaciers, nor was the flood this year and in past years caused by any extreme weather event.

The seasonal river that starts in the Chure Range has been mined for sand and boulders by contractors, so there is nothing to check the velocity of the water during the monsoon, which overflows its banks and races across farmlands.

In a nearby village, 44-year-old Ganesh Sah also lost his newly planted paddy. He planted it again, only for it to be washed away again and again.

"After the third replanting I ran out of seeds, and had to stop," he tells us, sitting on the roadside with his chin in his palms to survey his field. "I will stop farming. It is just not worth it anymore."

These fertile farms of the Tarai plains used to be Nepal's grain basket. The surplus crops fed the country, and the farmers prospered. Even if monsoon floods came down the rivers, it replenished the soil with nutrients and made them even more fertile the next year.

But it was when new road embankments in Nepal and India started impounding monsoon runoff and

quarrying in the Chure raised the sedimentation load of rivers and changed their hydrology, that the rivers started rampaging through the floodplains.

"Until as recently as ten years ago, we had three crops a year. Wheat, paddy and maize, and we had a good market price for them," says Thakani Devi, 69. "But we have had no harvest for the past few years."

Her husband Deeplal Chaudhari looks worried as he relates how it is a struggle to pay off the loan he took out to buy seeds for this year's crop, as well as take care of his 17-member extended family. The only way they have managed to survive is from the remittances sent home by one of their sons who went to Malaysia to work.

The crisis is driving thousands of households across the Madhes Province away from farming for good. The younger generation does not want to farm anyway, and now the ecological crisis of the Chure rivers is destroying agriculture.

Besides destroying crops, the raging rivers can also turn deadly as happened in 2018. Bhabichhan Sah, 42, says, "Last year's monsoon wiped out our standing rice crop. The next monsoon on the Ratu will probably wash us all away."

After losing the two sets of paddy he planted last monsoon due to floods, 35-year-old Sanjay Sah Sonar has decided to abandon farming altogether. Ironically, he is looking for a job in the sand mining quarry that is the cause of the floods that devastated his farm. If he does not find work there, he might join the millions of Nepalis who migrate abroad for employment.

"It just does not make sense to farm anymore," he states matter-of-factly.

Tracing the Origin

After observing the devastation downstream, we travelled up the Ratu to trace the river's origins. We traced the source of the flood to a sand mining business (called 'crusher') in the Bardibas Municipality along the East West Highway, at the foothills of the Chure Range.

We deployed a drone to give us a bird's eye view of how the crusher company was mining the river bed for sand, boulders, pebbles and turning them into raw material to feed the voracious appetite of the construction industry in Nepal and India.

Besides mining the river bed, the real estate mafia is also involved in channelling the rivers so that the government land along the floodplains can be parcelled out to be sold either to developers, or to rent it to the sand mining companies.

Since farming does not make sense anymore, villagers are selling the sand that covers their fields to the sand mining companies. Pure sand fetches 100 Rs per tractor load, while impure sand mixed with soil can be sold for 50 Rs.

Bijaya Singh is doing his PhD on the Chure quarries and how these operations affect downstream river flows and farms. He says the rivers are narrowed by the embankments, and the sediment load on the rivers has increased because of the sand mining, raising the riverbed further south.

"While the mining is destructive, what has compounded the risk is that the rivers have been narrowed by artificially channelling them and floodplains, which would have reduced the damage during the monsoon, have been lost" Singh explains.

His research published by the Central Geology Department of Tribhuvan University cites the channelling of the Ratu's many rivulets into one main flow to make it easier to mine sand as another reason for the floods, which flowed through the nearby town and destroyed croplands along the banks.

A satellite image from 2015 shows the Ratu River spreading across a wide floodplain with many rivulets. In fact, images from 2013 show that the Ratu used to flow separately towards Kisannagar and Begdawar in the Dhanusha district. But this distributary has been blocked with sand barriers, and the crusher company is extracting sand and boulders from the former river bed.

"The main reason for the destruction of infrastructure and crops downstream is due to unregulated over-extraction of riverine material," says Uttam Babu Shrestha of the Global Institute For Interdisciplinary Study in Lalitpur. "This has not just unleashed disasters, but it has also affected the biodiversity of the entire Chure-Tarai belt."

It was when new road embankments in Nepal and India started impounding monsoon runoff and quarrying in the Chure raised the sedimentation load of rivers and changed their hydrology, that the rivers started rampaging through the floodplains.

The Chure Watershed

The Chure is the youngest and southernmost fold of the Himalayan mountains. It is composed mostly of uplifted top soil and boulders and does not have bedrock beneath. This makes the low-lying range fragile especially during extreme weather events. A downpour can easily dissolve an entire Chure ridge in a matter of hours if it has been stripped of vegetation, or if there is indiscriminate quarrying going on.

Unregulated sand and boulder mining by contractors in the past decades has ravaged the Chure. The soil, sand and stones are transported down to the plains by monsoon floods, and these overflow into farmlands, and raise the level of the floodplain.

"Destroying the forests in the Chure for quarrying also disturbs the natural recharging of groundwater on which the plains to the south depend to replenish wells," explains Bijaya Singh. "And after boulders and stones are extracted from rivers, the floods become more destructive because there is nothing to break their flow."

Associate Professor Kumudraj Kafle of Kathmandu University's Department of Environment and Engineering says that with the Chure denuded of forests, the rivers now have such high sediment loads that the sand is deposited downstream, exacerbating flood risks as it is easier for rivers to overflow their banks.

"The sand downstream is not considered of good quality for construction, so there is not much extraction," Kafle says, "the mining is happening more in the northern area where pure sand that is in high demand in India is plentiful."

The sand and boulder extraction to feed the export market for construction material to India is ultimately affecting the farmlands and towns across the border in India itself. At Jaleswar on the Indian border, the level of the river has been rising by up to 40cm every year, so there is talk of raising the embankments to prevent future floods.

Unregulated sand and boulder mining by contractors in the past decades has ravaged the Chure.

The Chair of Jaleswar Community Development and Advocacy Platform says the whole town is now at high risk of floods and this risk is also present downstream across the border in India. Future floods may be catastrophic as the climate crisis unleashes extreme weather events like monsoon downpours that dump up to 300mm of rain in 24 hours on the Chure.

The community-based flood information system installed by the ICIMOD at the Ratu River bridge near Bardibas shows that even when the water level rises by only 1m, downstream areas are flooded because of raised river beds.

Where are the Extractors?

According to the images taken by satellite and drone along the bank of the Ratu River from the Bardibas Municipality to the Bhangaha, there is sand mining and processing crushers in operation at 38 sites. Ground level inspections showed that there are two excavators digging up sand along a 400m stretch.

In Jaleswar, a bridge that was destroyed in the previous flood has been rebuilt but even the new bridge is at risk of being washed away in a future flood due to sand mining.

A satellite image taken in February 2018 shows only two small sand excavation pits along the floodplain of the Ratu River. A photo taken only a year later shows that these pits had widened to up to 60m in diameter. The ensuing flood destroyed embankments in Banchauri constructed to protect 1,600 households in the Balawa Municipality.

Still, the extraction is continuing with excavators 50m south of the Balawa-Janakpur road, endangering the bridge. A levee made 200m upstream to protect the bridge was destroyed in last year's flood.

Theoretically, the upcoming local elections should help bring greater accountability to municipal governments and clean up the corruption that drives the crusher contractors. However, locals say that the elections have actually focused the minds of local leaders on raising money for their campaigns, and this means there will be more destructive quarrying – making the next monsoon even more destructive.

"We need an embankment built right away to prepare for this year's flood, but the Chief District Officer and local government are asleep," says farmer Bhabichhan Sah. "We are trapped."

Indeed, local farmers here are collateral damage in the collusion between local governments and contractors who fund and protect each other.

Further east in the Mahottari district, contractors have dug a 35-metre pit to extract sand from the river. Nearby, an excavator was loading the sand into three tipper trucks waiting to haul them away.

Near the bridge at Dhamaura, in the Balawa Municipality, there are 30 to 50m long pits along the riverbeds

These crusher industries need to be duly registered in the Office of the Company Registrar or in the Cottage and Small-Scale Industries Office under the Department of Industry. None of this has been done.

for extracting sand and boulders. Satellite images of that bridge show scars from last year's floods upstream and downstream from it. The extraction has now put the nearby town of Rauja Bazar at high risk.

In the Kisannagar area of Bardibas, we saw excavators busily lifting sand into tipper trucks, putting the Nandalal Engineering Campus and the town of Kisannagar itself 500m downstream at high risk.

No Permits

The Bardibas Municipality has not granted any permits for sand and boulder extraction from its rivers this fiscal year. But the Municipality's own records show that there are 25 crusher industries operating in Ratu River area.

Mishrilal Yadav of the municipality's Revenue Department says that crushers need licenses to extract raw materials from rivers. These crusher industries need to be duly registered in the Office of the Company Registrar or in the Cottage and Small-Scale Industries Office under the Department of Industry. None of this has been done.

The quarry owners appear to be using a loophole about mining and sand processing to continue their illegal extraction without permits. After filing an application under the Freedom of Information Act, we received details from the Bardibas Municipality and Cottage and Small-Scale Industries Office that there are indeed 66 crusher and sand processing industries in operation in the Mahottari district alone.

Chief of the Cottage and Small-Scale Office, Mahottari Krishna Kumar Mishra made the startling admission that there is no provision for punishment against the industries if they do not renew their registration.

"That is why the federal government had to make a rule regarding what punishment should be levied on those not renewing," he stated, "but that did not happen." So, the municipal and provincial tax offices are collecting revenues from industries that are essentially illegal.

The rules governing the extraction of sand and boulders from rivers state that local governments must give the permission. Those crushers working in the Chure need further permission from the Chure-Tarai Madhes Protection Development Committee. We collected records of 116 companies that had no such permit.

The Center for Data Journalism Nepal (CDJN) collected information from 137 local governments within the Chure Protection Area in the past year that showed permission had been given to 21 local units at 164 river sites to extract 4.26 million cubic metres of sand.

These were more permits than the year before when 45 rivers and 93 river banks were allowed to be mined, amounting to 2.2 million cubic metres of sand. The impact of such rampant extraction has damaged highway bridges, as well as downstream settlements, farmlands and infrastructure, the Committee said.

As per the guidelines, rivers cannot be mined within two km of towns and forests, and should be at least 500m away from highways, roads and suspension bridges. The Committee has halted river extraction in Arghakhanchi, Nawalparasi, and Rupendehi in the western Tarai, but no such action has been taken in the Madhes Province.

The Chure Terai Madhesh Protection and Management Masterplan warned of serious danger to irrigation canals, highways, new railway lines, drinking water supplies and hydropower projects due to extraction along the rivers.

Yet, the masterplan remains just a plan. The exploitation and extraction of natural resources is expected to accelerate in this election year. ■

SACRED DANCE MEDITATION

BY MONKS AT SHECHEN MONASTERY

Sonam Lama Hyolmo

With the arrival of the Tibetan new year (Gyalpo Losar) on March 3, monks at Shechen Monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal have already performed one of the sacred dances to welcome the new year.

Yamantaka Cham is a sacred dance meditation performed by monks and masters of the monastery in the 12th month of the Tibetan calendar. It is generally performed at the end of the year to ward off negativity and bless the new year.

Every year monasteries in Kathmandu carry out holy cham practices as per the monastic lineage and tradition. Yamantaka cham is one of these.

Yamantaka is revered as the wrathful manifestation of Manjushri, the deity of wisdom, and also believed to be the god of death, Yamaraj. The two-day dance meditation is the concluding ritual of a five-day Drupchen (prayer ceremony).

The dance meditation is observed by a diverse group of spectators with a wide variety cultural backgrounds. The Buddhist belief holds that the dance meditation maintains the practice of Thongdol i.e., 'liberating spectators by sight', meaning that those witnessing the dance rid themselves of obstacles and obscurations.

Adzom Gyalse Rinpoche, one of the cham masters, commemorates the occasion as a sacred practice of giving and receiving blessings for the year.

One of the significant sessions within the cham is the cutting of the linga. A linga is a human form made of dough, which embodies negativity and mental obscurations. First, the evil and negativity is invoked

on the linga. It is then pierced by a phurba (ritual dagger), while mantras are chanted. The meditative part is that it should be pierced by a compassionate heart unaffected by mental afflictions.

It is then cut into five pieces to symbolize the destruction of mental afflictions, especially the five poisons of desire, pride, anger, ignorance and jealousy. The dance meditation followed by the burning of the effigy of Yamantaka marks the end of the practice.

All the practices are carried out with rituals and mantra chanting. Every symbol or action embodies a meaning that is conducted according to the Buddhist scriptures. It is therefore important for spectators witnessing the practice to acknowledge the value and essence of it.

And it is not only the spectators that are liberated by the practice, but also the body, speech and mind of the dancers. They are clad in heavy costumes and huge masks which liberate their body. Similarly, chanting mantras and reflecting upon themselves as the manifestation of Yamantaka while dancing liberates their speech and mind.

Although the dance may seem subtle to spectators, it evokes a series of stresses, which come to a crescendo in the dancer's mind. "Catching the rhythm of a musical beat through mantra chanting, imagining

oneself as a manifestation of Yamantaka and memorizing dance steps, all come to a crescendo, building to an utmost pressure," says Pema Sangpo, one of the dancers. He has been performing for more than a decade now but finds it challenging to match the energy and spirit of the practice. "However, imaging sublime rays falling upon our bodies, piercing the dark and unleashing our Buddha nature is the heart of the practice and this reflection is crucial."

Despite nights of preparation and long years of performing, the challenge remains to excel as a dancer. Tandin Paljor, one of the cham mentors shares that he is less apprehensive now having performed for more than a decade. "As a beginner I used to watch my seniors perform, which helped me improvise and create the right attitude," he says.

He reminisces about a moment few years ago when he performed as the lead dancer but ended up making mistakes on a few steps. The responsibility in a way lies with the lead dancer to guide the others. Therefore, the leader should remain more cautious in that regard.

He adds, "I have learnt from that incident. No matter how serious, it is wise to learn from your mistakes. All that matters, in the end, is that you try to better yourself each day, and I feel this understanding largely applies to this sacred practice." ■

Sonam Lama Hyolmo

Alumni, Diploma of Visual Journalism,
Asian Center for Journalism

Sonam Lama Hyolmo is a freelance multimedia journalist based in Kathmandu, Nepal. Having worked as a journalist for more than half a decade now, she writes at the intersection of social and environmental justice, largely focusing on marginalized and climate vulnerable communities in

@sonam.hl

@sonamlamahyolmo

@sonamlamahy0lm0

https://www.linkedin.com/in/sonam-lama-hyolmo-09a95513a/

sonamlama1224@gmail.com

TECH WHIZ FROM MANILA'S SLUM

From Drugs to Apps

Arjay L. Balinbin

Arjay L. Balinbin

Student, Master of Journalism, Ateneo De Manila University

Arjay L. Balinbin is a journalist based in Manila, Philippines. He is a senior business reporter for the Philippines' oldest business newspaper, BusinessWorld Publishing Corporation. He covers everything technology, telecommunications, and transportation regarding publicly listed companies, startups, and government agencies related to such. Aside from the Philippines, he has also covered events in Spain, Germany, and Malaysia.

@peace81368
@evolution_v.8
@Arjay_BWorld
linkedin.com/in/arjay-l-balinbin-3a6085233
arjaybalinbin@gmail.com

"God saved me," declared Jay Angelo Pineda.

He was 14. The gang was standing in a "strange" alley, through which few dared to pass—except for a group of young street evangelists that sunny day.

"We were armed with sumpak (homemade shotguns). I saw no sign of fear in their faces," Pineda said in an interview.

"There was a bizarre energy. I felt like my spirit was being lifted the moment they approached me," he continued.

He said meeting the street evangelists from Destiny Church was "God's plan."

"I was supposed to meet a buyer that day. It didn't happen. It never happened again."

His path changed in 2014, two years before the Duterte drug war that killed at least 8,663 people, including at least 73 children, according to a report from the UN Human Rights Council.

"When I was 12, I was the youngest gang leader in our barangay (village). I was a high school freshman dropout. My life was a total mess," Pineda said.

He grew up in a Catholic household.

He has a sister who is four years younger than him. His parents were both working professionals.

"I lived in a community where extreme poverty and illegal activities like drug trade were ways of life," Pineda said.

He matured in the streets and narrow alleys of Batasan Hills, known as a slum colony in Quezon City, just northeast of the Philippine capital.

That was Pineda's paradise as a child.

"I felt that something was lacking in my life, so I tried to figure out what it was by joining my friends in the streets," he said.

Speaking softly, Pineda recalled that he and his friends sold shabu, or methamphetamine hydrochloride, in the village. He was just 12 when he started.

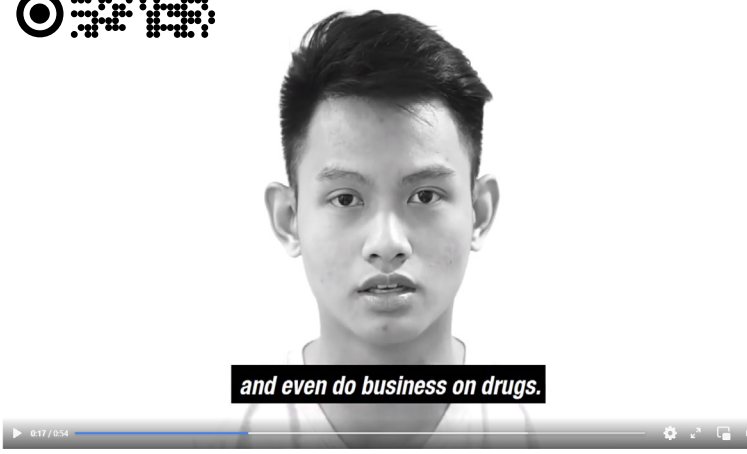
"I was an occasional drug user," Pineda admitted. As a pusher, he could earn P100 to P5,000 per transaction.

"I was scared, of course. There's fear within us. It's normal. But I had gotten used to that kind of business," he said.

Pineda was just one of the many children in the country involved in illegal drug activities.

From 2016 to 2019 alone, Philippine authorities have rescued more than 2,000 children from the illegal drug trade, according to a July 2019 report by the state-run Philippine News Agency.

Luckily, Pineda was not part of the statistics.



Jay Pineda's story: https://fb.watch/dY4p5TTY7I/

REFORMED

Pineda has been very active in the church for eight years now.

He has spent the past six years working to make a difference, to shed a stigma tied to his dark past.

Pineda has gone from a troublemaker to a community hero.

In November, more than 8,000 people gathered on Facebook Live to celebrate as the 23-year-old tech whiz received the Manuel L. Quezon 18th Gawad Parangal award for his creative and innovative contribution during the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

Pineda developed an app to help frontliners with their daily commute during the strict quarantine period.

"My heart is full, and I bring back all the highest praise and glory to you, Lord. It is all because of Him," Jay said in a Facebook post after receiving the award.

He now focuses on church, community outreach activities, and tech projects.

In college, he discovered his passion for artificial intelligence (AI) — the concept behind the creation of machines or apps that can think, act, and learn like humans.

Pineda dreamed up Whiz Philippines six years ago. It's a tech startup that gave birth to the app that has helped at least 20,000 commuters during the pandemic.

The free app provides information about Quezon City's free bus routes, commuting guidelines, COVID-19 updates, and health center and barangay directories, among others, Pineda explained enthusiastically.

He wants to create more AI apps to address the needs of the people of Quezon City.

But despite his achievements, there are still people — old friends and neighbors — in his community who do not see him as a reformed person.

"I hear people still calling me a drug addict, a pusher. It hurts me," Pineda said. "It seems that persons like me who want to change, have no chance of being fully accepted again."

Pineda wants to tell the Philippines that there is hope for individuals like him.

"They can change. They can make a difference in society. Give them a chance," he said.

But the tough-talking President had a different message in 2016 to "you drug pushers, holdup men, and do-nothings."

"You'd better get out of here. I will kill you."

Pineda said, "That's not right. There's hope." ■

ARTIQULATE Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Media Programme Asia

THE DEPTH OF A SCAR

The growing PTSD crisis in Kashmir

Faisal Magray

Outside the sun is blazing at its zenith. Little light filters through the small window that illuminates the room. Jameela Banu, 47, is sitting inside her kitchen checking her medicines wrapped in a polythene bag in the dim light. Her five-year-old grandson is playing with his mother after returning from school. On the shelf is a picture of her 15-year-old son Ishtiyaq Ahamad Khanday who was killed in the 2010 Kashmir uprising.

Jameela vividly remembers when Ishtiyaq was killed, unable to speak of him without shedding tears.

From the day she witnessed the killing of her son, Jameela Banu hasn't been able to sleep alone in her house. She spends the day walking through the house, closing windows, doors, and locking them repeatedly. Her husband, Ghulam Ahmad Khanday took her to many doctors, and finally to a psychiatric hospital in Srinagar, the capital of Indian-administered Kashmir. She was diagnosed with depression and Post Traumatic Stress disorder (PTSD) and is undergoing treatment.

Ishtiyaq's death left her deeply traumatized. 'The situation in Anantnag, a district in South Kashmir was tense. A group of youth from Lazbal area of Anantnag, came out to protest against the killing of civilians in Sopore area of North Kashmir, but everything was normal in our village. We were building a new house and my son was with his father, guiding carpenters and electricians. I gave him some money to get bread from the market. He had just reached the gate, when a group of protesters suddenly appeared in our lane. They were being chased by the police and the paramilitary. To disperse the group of protesters police and paramilitary fired indiscriminately and some bullets hit my son's neck and abdomen, killing him instantly,' recalls Jameela.

Living with PTSD, Jameela's life has become a continuous challenge. She still gets flashbacks and nightmares and is totally dependent on anti-depressants and other medicines to cope with the symptoms.

'Eight years have passed; the incident is still fresh in my mind. I cannot close my eyes without seeing the face of my son. I have lost all ability to concentrate or even complete simple tasks. I am seeing violent images every time I close my eyes. I have stopped visiting relatives or getting involved in gatherings. I am also attending counseling sessions, but I'm still unable to cope up or overcome this scar in my memory.'

Her husband Ghulam was forced to sell the cab to pay off the debt he owed for his newly built single-storey house. They are now being taken care of by their son-in-law.

Although the family has lodged a First Information Report (FIR) against the killing of the young boy, their repeated attempts to seek justice have been futile.

"Eight years ago, the government ordered a magisterial inquiry and appointed then Assistant Commissioner Revenue, GM Dar, as the inquiry officer. The inquiry team in its report indicted five state policemen,

“I have lost all ability to concentrate or even complete simple tasks. I am seeing violent images every time I close my eyes. I have stopped visiting relatives or getting involved in gatherings.”

including two officers, for the killing. The report was submitted to the government, but no action against the culprits was taken and they are still roaming free. I have now completely lost faith in the system and all hopes to get justice have been completely shattered ” said Ghulam.

Where time stands still

Kashmir has been experiencing a prolonged armed conflict for the last two and half decades, which has taken a heavy toll on both the socio-economic and psychological wellbeing of the people. Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since the two gained independence from British rule in 1947. Both the nations claim the territory in full. Several rebel groups have for decades fought Indian soldiers deployed in the territory, demanding independence for the region or its merger with Pakistan. Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have died in the fighting. The insurgency in Kashmir began in 1989 and the ongoing armed conflict has claimed a total of 41,000 lives in the past 27 years, which means an average of 4 deaths per day in the state or 1519 casualties every year, according to the latest available government data, the Hindustan Times reported in 2017.

Abdul Qadeer Bhat, 34, was 12-years-old when he was tortured by the Indian Army in his home. He was returning from school when he saw officers in his home, conducting a search. When he entered the house, he was taken into a separate room and tortured for two hours.

‘An army major took me into the room and I was asked to tell him the whereabouts of the local militants. I honestly told them that I don’t know anything. The army major took out his knife and gave me a deep cut on my palm. That was painful. After that, he continuously slapped me, like a hundred times till my face turned blue. He took me out of [the]

room, removed my shirt, hoisted the Light Machine Gun (LMG) on my shoulder as a weight and started firing indiscriminately. That moment was horrific. My entire body started shaking and I fell unconscious.'

Qadeer says the army major along with his subordinates tried to stab him to death and would almost certainly have succeeded, had the commanding officer (CO) not arrived on the scene.

After the event, Qadeer was in a deep shock for a long time. He was unable to keep the memories of the attack out of his mind. At night, he would have terrible dreams of torture, and would wake up screaming. Scenes of torture would run repeatedly through his mind and disrupt his focus. He dropped out of school after he developed difficulties concentrating.

Qadeer's parents started worrying seeing his condition. They took him to a general physician in their village but nothing improved. He, too, was referred to a psychiatric hospital in Srinagar, and diagnosed with PTSD and severe depression.

'It's been 22 years now, I am still dependent on anti depressants, as it's helping to decrease the levels of anxiety and depression. My life has become totally meaningless as I am unable to do anything. I am confined to my room.'

Whenever Qadeer hears loud noises, such as a gun firing, loud music, people shouting or huge gatherings, he starts to panic. At night he still has difficulty relaxing and falling asleep.

'My aim was to become a scholar but that dream has been shattered. I couldn't continue my studies after this incident. I remain tense at all times and I'm easily startled. I feel "dirty" and somehow shamed by this traumatic event and feel rejected.'

Kashmir remains one of the world's most heavily militarized zones. According to the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) 2015 report, Structures of Violence, the number of soldiers, paramilitary, police and other agencies deployed by India in Jammu and Kashmir is estimated between 650,000 -750,000, giving it an extremely high (70: 1200) force to population ratio. According to the 2011 census, the state of Jammu and Kashmir has a population of more than 12 million. So India has deployed 1 soldier to 12 Kashmiri civilians. The

"My aim was to become a scholar but that dream has been shattered. I couldn't continue my studies after this incident."

Indian armed forces in Kashmir operate with impunity provided by law – the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) – under which they can shoot anybody on mere suspicion and can enter and search any premises without a warrant.

The prevalence of mental health issues in Kashmir has significantly increased since the insurgency began in 1989. Also, the mental health services are inadequate, and accessibility to the people of Kashmir remains a hurdle. Kashmir's only psychiatric hospital — Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (IMHANS), in Srinagar, the summer capital of Indian Administered Kashmir is facing a manpower shortage and inadequate facilities, which is taking a heavy toll on mental health care.

"Every day, the hospital is seeing a huge influx of patients from across the Kashmir valley, who suffer from mental health issues. But it becomes difficult for us to manage that with limited resources and manpower. There are only six doctors, who run both IMHANS and the psychiatry unit at the Shri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital (SMHS) in Srinagar on rotational basis. We don't have trained clinical psychologists, counsellors and no recreational facilities are available for mental health patients," said a hospital official on condition of anonymity.

Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) released a comprehensive report on mental health in Kashmir and concluded that half of all residents of the valley have 'mental health problems'. The report found that nearly 1.8 million adults-45 percent of Kashmir's adult population-suffer from some form of mental distress. A majority of people have experienced conflict-related trauma. According to the report, 37% of adult males and 50% of females are suffering from probable depression; 21% of males and 36% of females have a probable anxiety-related disorder; and 18% men and 22% women have been diagnosed with probable PTSD.

"Trauma in Kashmir is a reality and is very prevalent. Due to the ongoing conflict, there has been sharp rise in mental health issues in Kashmir, which has resulted in chronic post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and drug abuse. The prevalence of mental health disorders is greater in women than in men. Apart from PTSD, the other mental disorders that we found among the Kashmiri people are schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, OCD, dysthymia and general anxiety disorder. "said Dr. Arshad Hussain, an associate professor of psychiatry at the Government Medical College in Srinagar, the summer capital of Indian administered Kashmir.

"Trauma in Kashmir is a reality and is very prevalent. Due to the ongoing conflict, there has been sharp rise in mental health issues in Kashmir."

Collateral damage

One morning in January last year, in a small village in southern Kashmir, Sarah Banu, 45, was busy doing her household chores, while her 18-year-old son Amir was playing an inter-village cricket match, away from home.

When the match was over, her son came back, had a bath and told his mother he was going for prayers

and would be back soon. That was the last time Sarah saw her son.

Two hours later, Sarah Banu called her son Amir, but his phone was switched off. She started worrying and went to nearby relatives to look for him.

'I became restless and went to neighboring villages to ask people about him, everyone was clueless. I couldn't sleep that night, I was thinking about him. I hoped that he would return.'

The next day, a photograph of the 18-year-old Amir carrying an AK-47 rifle was doing rounds on social media. The militant group, which Amir had joined posted his picture on social media announcing he had joined them.

When Sarah Banu heard the news, she collapsed and slipped into a deep shock. Sarah says, whenever she sees the bedroom and belongings of her son, she becomes restless. To overcome the trauma, she left her home and went to her father's place to live, because the memories of her 18-year-old son were haunting her.

Soon after, she started getting panic attacks and was soon diagnosed with PTSD.

'I struggle with sleeping. I am on different types of medication. Often, I have panic attacks and my dreams are nightmares. My dreams are about my son getting killed. There is nothing "happy" about the things that race through my mind during the night. When [the] sun sets and everything becomes dark and quiet, the dreams about my son start recurring, which re-triggers the trauma, making me restless,' Sarah explains.

Amir was adored by his family, relatives and friends. When Sarah hears news of any gunfight in Kashmir, her hands start trembling and the color of her face turns pale. She starts crying and screaming for her son.

"Amir never participated in any protest demonstration, he was normal. I never thought that one day he

will leave us and join militants. I don't know what compelled him to join militants. I am completely lost and have no interest in doing things. I always pray for his survival. When I wake up, I am already anxious, tired and short of breath. For the last three months, I am suffering from memory loss too.'

The Jammu and Kashmir police and army are frequently asking Sarah Banu and her 47-year-old husband to appear at the police station and army camp for questioning.

'It's very traumatic for me to face the security forces. We haven't seen our son since the day he left, and neither has he reached out to us. We don't have any contact with him, but we are still being pushed by the authorities to ask our son to surrender. It's adding more distress to our lives,'says Sarah.

Trauma and healing

In the afternoon of 29 July 2016, Naseer Ahmad, 27, was busy at his salon in the northern district of Baramulla, giving a scalp massage to a customer, when he heard loud voices outside and saw a group of protesters being chased by the police and paramilitary troops. He quickly shut his shop and ran towards the narrow alley leading to a neighbor's house which he considered a safer spot.

'I went inside the house and was sitting in a room on the second story. Outside, police started firing tear gas shells and pellets indiscriminately. The window of the room was open and some of the pellets hit me. I fell to the ground and blood started oozing out from my right eye.'

Naseer's family and friends rushed him to Srinagar's SMHS Hospital, the main state-run facility. He underwent three operations and doctors say he has lost all vision in his right eye. His father even took him to Amritsar for specialized treatment, but doctors there said the damage was permanent.

'The loss of vision in my right eye was a psychological trauma for me. People can see my scar outside, but on the inside, nobody can see how I am really feeling. My life has entirely changed and I am struggling to cope. I haven't earned a single penny since this incident. I am totally dependent on my family. I have become a liability for them,' he says.

Naseer's family depends on the earnings of his father, a farmer, and his elder brother, who runs a small business. 'I got married in 2015. I have two young daughters;

“The loss of vision in my right eye was a psychological trauma for me. People can see my scar outside, but on the inside, nobody can see how I am really feeling. My life has entirely changed and I am struggling to cope.”

I can’t do anything for my own family. I have no control over anything and I am feeling I lack confidence and am constantly over-thinking. Sometimes I don’t want to leave the house fearing that someone would come and kill my daughters.’

In many cases, families aren’t familiar with PTSD as a mental illness, and are lost as to how to help their loved ones. “It’s very hard for family members to understand the person suffering from PTSD. Its symptoms influence the behavior of a person and can cause him to appear angry, strange and upset. PTSD victims often take a long time to recover and family support plays an important role in it. “said Saima Khan, a Clinical psychologist.

A small room with a huge front window is eerily silent. Each day, Ayesha Begum, 58, spends the entire day peering outside. She says her life came to a standstill after her son Javed, 25, joined militants.

Javed, 25, was mature-minded, polite in nature and the oldest among his siblings. He was 10-years-old when his father died of a heart attack. To support his family, he gave up his studies and started working in a local bakery. But one day in 2007, he went missing.

When he didn’t return, Ayesha called his friends and went to nearby villages to search for him. The family then filed a missing persons report at the local police Station. After several days, Javed’s family came to know that he had joined the militants.

Many years have passed, and Ayesha Banu no longer remembers the date when her son was killed, but she remembers the last meeting with her son.

‘That day he came home to see me and had lunch with us. When he was about to leave, he hugged me tightly and left. Next morning when I woke up, I learned from neighbors that my son had been arrested by the army in a nearby village and later killed. Afterwards, the army raided my house and told me to collect the dead body from the local police station.’

‘I ignored the symptoms of mental illness for a long time. But my condition detoriated day by day. One day, my nephew, who is also a paramedic, took me to a psychiatric Hospital in Srinagar city, where I was diagnosed with PTSD. Since then I am on medication, but still I have moments of hyperventilation, palpitations, flashbacks and little interest in doing things.’ ■

Some sources’ names have been changed by request.

Faisal Magray

Alumni, Diploma of Visual Journalism,
Asian Center for Journalism

Faisal Magray is a photojournalist based in India. His work revolves around documenting global and local issues - primarily focused on human rights, health, the aftermath of conflicts, and socioeconomics.

@faisalrafiqmagray
@faisal_magray
@faisalrafiq1
faisalmagray.com
faisalrafiqmagray@gmail.com

WHO ARE WE, WHERE DO WE BELONG?

Ziaul Haque Oisharjh

Identity is more about how a person feels about him/herself and his/her belongings. It can't be justified by a paper of statement. The story of the Urdu speaking, Bihari community is going through this dilemma. People call them Pakistani, Bihari, Muslim Biharis and Rajakar. These people are left behind after the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971. People argue they took the side of Pakistan during the war and after the war Pakistan ditched these people and didn't allow them into their country. These people lived in many camps for 33 years without having citizenship of any country. The camps are named "Stranded Pakistani Repatriation Camp", with many camp numbers added at the end of it. A family were allocated to an 8*8 size room, but a family of five is now a family of 12 or even more. There is no privacy or secrecy for anyone living there as too many people live in a very small room. Seeing no other way, many of them raised their building, unplanned, taking risks so that they can adjust their family in the allocated place.

In the year 2008, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh stated that all the members of the Urdu speaking community are now citizens of Bangladesh and directed the election commission to include them in the voting list and provide them with National Identity Cards.

The problem begins when the people living in Stranded Pakistani Repatriation Camp claim that they do have national identity card for voting, but that it limits them to voting only. They don't have any of the other rights that every other Bangladeshi National has. They can't be issued a passport with the address where they have been living for years, i.e. the camps. For that reason, if anyone asks them for identification, many of them show the papers they had while living in the camp for Stranded Pakistani. There is an ongoing argument that, as they're now citizens, they have to pay tax, electricity bills and other utility charges, which the people living in the camp deny.

The discussion is still going on, but I tried to portray the inner souls of these people, their feeling about their identity and the poor conditions they're living in. There are about 70% of them who want to stay in Bangladesh with proper national citizen rights, 10% still want to repatriate to Pakistan and the rest of them remain silent, but all of them speak Urdu as their mother tongue.

Many of them, who became capable, left their camp and live in a rented house as the living conditions in the camp are getting worse every single day. These people and families no longer like to keep in touch with or maintain connection with the Stranded Pakistani Repatriation Camp. They say, that they have accepted their Bangladeshi nationality completely and are living with it. So, now they don't want their surroundings to treat them as Pakistani again. But how long are the others going to take to choose and accept what they really are? ■

Ziaul Haque Oisharjh

Alumni, Diploma of Visual Journalism,
Asian Center for Journalism

Ziaul Haque Oisharjh is a journalist and documentarian currently based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Through his photography and videography, Ziaul tells the stories of Bangladeshi people, their communities, and their culture. He views his focus as observing the unseen and untold, and presenting them in his stories without bias.

@oisharjh
@ziaulhaqueoisharjh
@oisharjh
linkedin.com/in/ziaul-haque-99a3b2149
oisharjh.com
oisharjh@gmail.com

HOW THE CLIMATE CRISIS ADDS TO CHILD MARRIAGE IN NEPAL

As harvests fail due to drought and floods, girls from marginalised families are forced to marry earlier to escape poverty.

Sonam Lama Hyolmo

"Mulai kyai thaa bhayaanai," murmurs Birjaman, pain and fatigue etched on his wizened face. He has just made a steep 3-hour climb from his village of Muktikot to a pharmacy carrying his semi-conscious daughter-in-law, Reti.

She has post-partum haemorrhage, and has not stopped bleeding. The clinic managed to save her life, but the young mother lost her three-month foetus. Reti was married off at 16, and at 22 already has two children.

The midwife says the miscarriage was due to weakness and heavy workload during pregnancy. Reti's husband is working in India, and she has to do all the household work, raise the children, take care of the livestock, and fetch water herself.

At the pharmacy, Gopal Singh says he sees cases like this often. This is the nearest medical stop for the predominantly Dalit village of Muktikot. He says, "This is nothing new around here, we get miscarriages like this daily. Many do not make it. Young mothers are not physically mature for childbearing and couples do not use contraceptives."

Marriage before age 20 is punishable by law in Nepal but it is still common. Low female literacy, poverty, discrimination and cultural norms play a role, but child marriage has become more prevalent as of late, as subsistence farmers cope with a succession of droughts and floods that have destroyed harvests.

Last winter, western Nepal suffered a 6-month drought that was followed by wildfires that raged for months. Then, two weeks ago the region was hit by a freak post-monsoon storm that destroyed standing crops. Farmers had been hopeful for a good harvest because of plentiful rain this monsoon, but the unseasonal downpour on 18-19 October unleashed landslides and floods and dashed their hopes.

Young mothers with their children in Muktikot where child marriage has become more prevalent as subsistence farmers cope with a succession of droughts and floods that have destroyed harvests.

Scientists say global warming has added to the moisture content in the atmosphere, triggering extreme weather with erratic monsoons, frequent droughts and cloudbursts. Families in food-deficit western Nepal, already in a precarious situation, have been pushed over the edge.

Already stricken by poverty and caste discrimination, the impact of climate crisis means that more parents now marry off their young daughters, who in turn end up risking their lives due to early pregnancy and poor diet.

"My father remarried after my mother died, and he married me off at 16 saying I would have a good life after marriage," recalls Reti.

Subi, 16, is also from the same village. She lost her new born baby two days after home delivery three months ago. She had not had a single pre-natal check-up, was too undernourished to breast feed properly, and her baby eventually died of hunger.

Subi herself bled for more than two weeks after the birth, and even though there were no men to carry her to the health post, she survived. She is still weak and anemic. Subi's friend Suna is also 16 and expecting her first baby. Afraid that she may have the same complication, she walked five hours to a pharmacy to get iron tablets.

Suna's mother Rauthi married her to a neighbour's son because the family's harvest failed after a long drought. She has seven children, all of whom have dropped out of school either to work in India, or to get married and raise their own children. The husbands of both Suna and Subi are also away in India, working to augment family income.

Most families here have at least one member working in India, and the income they send home was what helped them survive when crops failed. But many Nepalis lost their jobs during the pandemic, so even this fallback option was not there for the past two years.

"Life here is tough, and getting tougher. Early marriage is the norm, since it is easier to get our daughters married, so we do not have to feed them," says Rauthi, two of whose seven children are handicapped and cannot go to school, or work.

Nearly 40% of girls in Nepal marry before they are 18, while some 14% give birth to their first child before their 19th birthday. Moreover, children of Dalit communities are at higher risk of being married young

Already stricken by poverty and caste discrimination, the impact of climate crisis means that more parents now marry off their young daughters, who in turn end up risking their lives due to early pregnancy and poor diet.

because of poverty, discrimination and limited access to resources.

Although child marriage is less common than it used to be, it is still prevalent despite laws banning it. Now, the economic crisis due to the pandemic and the climate emergency has exacerbated the situation.

This is evident in Bajura, a district in Nepal with one of the worst development indicators with more than 70% of people living below the poverty line, while Nepal's national average is 26%.

Frequent droughts and crop failures in recent years have further impoverished Bajura's subsistence farmers. As it is, only 9% of the land in the mountainous district is arable, with a mere 1.42% with irrigation facility. Crop yields of barley, wheat, maize and millet harvests have dropped sharply in the past 10 years.

Every year the district faces a shortage of 11,000 tonnes food grain, and a World Food Programme (WFP) bulletin classified 85% of the population being food insecure. Muktikot is one of the villages classified as very vulnerable to deficient nutrition.

Even in years with normal harvest, food grown here is enough only to feed families for three months in year. The result is out-migration for work, malnutrition, forced child marriage, high maternal and infant mortality.

With farmers so dependent on rain-fed agriculture, their fragile existence is even more precarious because of climate-related extreme weather. A 30-year

The green mountains of Muktikot during monsoon.

"We need climate-resilient and gender-responsive plans because women are more adversely affected by socio-economic, geographical and climatic vulnerability."

precipitation data at the nearby Martadimet station shows that total annual rainfall has fallen, there is little winter snow, and even that tends to come with destructive storms.

"Rainfall has always been unpredictable in these parts, but these days there is very little winter snow that we need for the spring marsi paddy and buckwheat," says 65-year-old farmer Brija Bahadur Bam. "And when it does rain, it is so heavy that it washes away the crops."

This all adds up to lower groundwater tables, which means even perennial springs have gone dry. Indira Kandel of the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology says that the rain and snow is then not enough to replenish the aquifers.

The link between drought and child marriage has been proven by research in India. Reetika Revathy Subramanian, a PhD student at the University of Cambridge, has studied how drought-induced migration in the caste-ridden Marathwada region of India has increased underage marriage.

"The decision for a girl to marry gets shaped by a web of intersecting factors, including poverty, access to education, social pressure and norms, harassment and intimidation, which is further exacerbated by disaster," she explains.

In Nepal's Bajura district, too, the Dalit community is more vulnerable to the impact of the climate crisis on agriculture than more privileged groups. "Child marriage is rampant here but it is more likely in fam-

A 17-year-old mother holding her baby. Nearly 40 percent of girls in Nepal marry before they are 18, while 14 percent give birth to their first child before they are 19.

Climate Change and Child Marriage in Nepal:
https://youtu.be/e6ptl6TJqUg

ilies hit hard by food crises and with many children," says Birban BK of the Nepal Climate Change Support Program (NCCSP).

The answer lies in making irrigation available to farmers so they are not affected by erratic rainfall, which is why the NCCSP prioritized building irrigation canals and flood-prevention gabion walls in Bajura.

Muktikot got its name from Maoists guerrillas during the insurgency who wanted to show that the Dalit village had been liberated from caste discrimination. The war has been over for 16 years, but life is, if anything, worse for the Dalits here.

Village officials and locals believe that the relocation of the entire community is the only way out. Plans are afoot for the rehabilitation of villagers to settlements up the mountains to an altitude of 2,500-3,000m where rainfall is more regular. They can grow cash crops like walnut and apple, but will be needing help accessing the market.

"These practices could be diversification of livelihoods and income sources through adopting climate-resilient cash crops, connecting farmers to the markets, promoting agro-forestry and use of bioengineering for infrastructure development," says Monika Upadhyay of WFP Nepal.

Even among Dalits, it is the women from the community who are even more affected by the climate crisis. The shortage of water adds to their daily drudgery, because they have to walk longer to reach springs that are still functioning.

Says Radha Wagle of the Climate Change Management Division at the Ministry of Environment: "In Bajura and other districts, we need climate-resilient and gender-responsive plans because women are more adversely affected by socio-economic, geographical and climatic vulnerability."

Nepal aims to implement these measures at local levels by 2030, the same year the government has set to end child marriage. But given that the practice is still rampant, it is an ambitious target.

Says Subramanian: "It is important to strengthen child marriage prevention groups, village-level committees to work closely with vulnerable families including women and girls in particular."

At nearby Radhumata Secondary School, only 13 of the 113 students in Grade 10 are unmarried. Manshova Buddha, 17, is one of them. She says: "With so many of my friends already married off by their parents, I also feel the pressure. But I am not going to give up on my dreams." ■

Some names have been changed.

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Sonam Lama Hyolmo

Alumni, Diploma of Visual Journalism,
Asian Center for Journalism

@sonam.hl
@sonamlamahyolmo
@sonamlamahy0lm0
https://www.linkedin.com/in/sonam-lama-hyolmo-09a95513a/
sonamlama1224@gmail.com

ARE THE KIDS ALRIGHT?

Rosette Adel

Student, Master of Journalism, Ateneo De Manila University

Rosette Adel is an editor and journalist for Manila-based online newsrooms Interaksyon and Philstar.com. Her work spans breaking news, investigative journalism, and mobile reporting about diverse issues in the Philippines, particularly tourism, heritage, and politics. Concurrently, she is a fellow of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation while pursuing her graduate studies at the Asian Center for Journalism, Ateneo de Manila University.

@rosetteadelwrites
@rosetteadel
@rosette_adel
linkedin.com/in/rosette-adel
rosetteadel.journoportfolio.com
rosette.adel@obf.ateneo.edu

Before the coronavirus pandemic struck, eight-year-old Ysabelle Bersamina's routine included going to school and bonding with her younger brother, Alonzo, and their cousins who frequently visited their home in Las Piñas City, south of Manila.

On weekends, their family was used to visiting malls and enjoying more leisure time.

However, when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared and the entire Philippines was placed under lockdown in March 2020, the government forced children to stay at home and schools were ordered to close.

This turned Ysabelle's daily routine and her mode of learning upside down.

She missed interacting with friends and teachers at school, as well as the weekly routine of going out for leisure time. Ysabelle also longed for relatives who could not visit her because of the lockdown.

"The changes were drastic. With the sudden shift away from the classroom, Ysabelle had to adjust to module learning, which was unfamiliar to her," Kristine Bersamina, Ysabelle's single mother, said in an online interview.

The single mum took on the new challenging role of becoming Ysabelle's teacher while also working.

"The pandemic did not only affect the kids but the entire household," she said.

Kristine shared that more than a year into the lockdown, her daughter's behaviour changed. Ysabelle sought more attention than before, but Kristine thought this was just normal until her daughter cried constantly for weeks in June 2021.

"Despite reassuring her that I was around, she would still cry nonstop. I tried all methods, showing my gentle and harsh sides but nothing worked. She would only sleep if she'd take the melatonin for kids I bought because I already felt helpless. I realized that I couldn't take it anymore since it was also affecting my sanity," Kristine said.

Filipino Children, Adolescents Grapple with Decreased Socialization

Rosette Adel

This prompted her to consult with a child psychiatrist who found that Ysabelle was suffering from panic attacks and prescribed her antidepressants, which she would take for months. The psychiatrist could not determine the root of the panic attacks because Ysabelle had difficulty expressing herself, but Kristine attributed it to the lockdown and lack of socialization.

UNICEF reported that at least one in seven children and young people lived under stay-at-home policies for most of 2020, leading to feelings of anxiety, depression and isolation.

Therefore, the Bersamina family is just one of the many families grappling with the adjustments brought about by the coronavirus lockdown.

Filipinos are known to be social and have close-knit ties with families, the mental health of several individuals including children and adolescents was affected when the lockdown was enforced.

UNICEF reported that at least one in seven children and young people lived under stay-at-home policies for most of 2020, leading to feelings of anxiety, depression and isolation.

What the studies say

In 2020, the United Nations annual World Happiness Report ranked the Philippines as the 52nd happiest country in the world out of 156 nations. This is 17 notches higher than the previous year.

The report, published annually by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, using data from the Gallup World Poll and Lloyd's Register Foundation, reflects the level of happiness before COVID-19 hit or the year 2019.

It bases the ranking of a country's happiness on variables such as gross domestic product per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom, generosity, and absence of corruption.

In its report released last March, however, the social-minded Philippines' level of happiness for 2020, the onset of the pandemic, dropped by nine spots.

It said mental health is among the casualties of both the pandemic and the lockdowns.

"As the pandemic struck, there was a large and immediate decline in mental health in many countries worldwide," it said.

"The early decline in mental health was higher in groups that already had more mental health problems - women, young people, and poorer people. It thus increased the existing inequalities in mental well-being," the UN report added.

This was the similar to the findings of a study commissioned by Save the Children Philippines entitled "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing of Children and Adolescents in Selected Areas in Metro Manila" released last October 27.

The non-government-organization Psychosocial Support and Children's Rights Resource Center (PSCRRC), which engages in psychosocial research support, conducted 126 in-depth mobile interviews with adolescents aged 13 to 18 and adult informants of children aged 6 to 12. This was to explore the children and adolescents' various experiences in their family and household, social life, education, and physical and mental health.

The participants were randomly sampled from selected villages in Navotas, Malabon, and Pasay City and purposely sampled in Metro Manila's largest city, Quezon City.

The report noted that decreased communication among friends was the most common social life stressor for both children and adolescents during the pandemic.

"Filipino families and children are afflicted or are experiencing a mental toll," said Elizabeth Protacio-De Castro, Ph.D., former professor of psychology at the University of the Philippines, who led the project.

She cited anxiety caused by COVID-19, mounting stigma and exclusion towards those infected, limited connection due to community restrictions and economic recession as some of the mental health effects on children.

The study also found that it was beneficial for children and adolescents to keep an active social life, through communication via social media, gaming, and spending more time with neighbouring peers.

Similarly, the research found that mutual help was the top coping strategy for children and adolescents during the lockdown.

"Children tend to seek help from parents and other relatives for their modules, while adolescents are likely to seek help from their friends/classmates and teachers," the study said.

The Children's Rehabilitation Center (CRC), a non-profit group devoted to caring for child victims of human rights violations, shared the same views as the research results.

In an online interview, it said that the lack of productive activities has contributed to a worsening of the mental health condition of children.

"Isolation, confinement, and lack of physical socialization cause widespread mental health problems among children and families including depression and anxiety. Children face anxiety about the negative impact of the pandemic on their lives. They are uncertain about the future," it said.

"Due to the lack of productive activities at home, children tend to spend more time on the internet wherein they sometimes experience cyber-bullying and also increased vulnerability to online sexual exploitation," the organization added.

During the pandemic, CRC also noted that there was an increase in inquiries about mental health from their social media page.

It cited that some adults sought for help and asked for advice on how to manage behavioural changes in children during the lockdown. Some also asked if the CRC's office was willing to accept their children because they were having difficulty handling them.

Helping hands

To help alleviate the mental woes of children and young people, CRC partnered with organizations to conduct psychosocial intervention activities online and face-to-face.

They helped them process their experiences through games, arts, music and one-on-one or group-counselling.

"With the assessment of a social worker, referrals were also made for severe cases. For 2021, we partnered with other children's rights organizations and conducted peer-to-peer training for children and young people. The participants themselves processed their experiences during the pandemic and were trained to become peer counsellors," it added.

However, it said that providing counselling to children and adolescents with mental concerns through telemedicine has been difficult due to fluctuating internet connections and device limitations.

CRC said these hinder the continuity and effectiveness of the process.

Children's mental health in the spotlight

One positive of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, was that it brought young people's mental health issues to the fore.

The UN said the pandemic has shone a light on mental health as never before.

"This increased public awareness bodes well for future research and better services that are so urgently needed," it said.

Parents likewise have become aware of the importance of well-being.

With this knowledge amid the pandemic, Facebook group Kids Are Allowed (KAA), with over 49,000 members, created an online community to help fellow parents navigate the pandemic and direct them to hangout places where children could go.

"Sharing secure and safe places where kids were allowed, enabled other kids to do freely what they liked doing before the pandemic — mingling with other kids but this time with precautions," said Hershey, founder of KAA.

Even the government lobbied for the easing of restrictions to let children go out, citing that it was "good for their physical, social and mental health."

And so, after 20 months in lockdown, the Philippine government finally lifted the travel ban on children in November 2021 and allowed them to explore outdoors in areas with low COVID-19 cases.

"The pandemic taught me not to downplay my kids' emotions, that we should listen more to them because they rely on us physically and emotionally."

Intervention points

A group of psychology researchers PSCRRC agreed with this measure, citing that exploring interventions based on neighbourhood-based social ties were important.

"In the context of the pandemic, neighbourhood peers have proved to be robust and significantly beneficial to mental health and wellbeing," it said.

The NGO advised parents, caregivers and guardians to indulge in awareness and build on children's mental health capabilities.

It recommended the government provide training and modules on child stress and coping strategies, positive child-rearing practices, corporal punishment consequences, and mental health promotion even in a state of poverty.

For parents like Kristine, the COVID-19 pandemic made her realize the significance of children's mental health and knowing how to provide the necessary support for their emotional and mental wellbeing.

"The pandemic taught me not to downplay my kids' emotions, that we should listen more to them because they rely on us physically and emotionally," Ysabelle's mum said.

"We should help end the mental health stigma because home is the first place where our children should feel safe, loved and protected," she concluded. ■

HOW MEDIA PRACTITIONERS HAVE LOST TO THE AUDIENCE

Industry Slipped into the Doldrums

Khawaza Main Uddin

"Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

– TS Eliot, The Rock, 1934

It's no longer a matter of debate that the mainstream media has lost its steam. Ordinary newspaper readers and television viewers – as well as those who make and break the news – understand the power of the media has been reduced to an anarchy of information. Professionals regret that the media industry, in its age-old shape, is on the wane.

What may be blamed, at least partly, for the declining circulation of printed newspapers and viewership of television, is 'journalism' – its style, reach, angles of reporting and analysis, selection of issues, storytelling method and coverage as a whole. Angry losers in the changing media landscape may curse smartphones with internet connection, which kill and accommodate in itself newspapers, radio, television, photo albums and cinema.

This industry has been further plagued by the pandemic in terms of falling circulation and revenue. Furloughs, layoffs and closures have been common practices everywhere. In the underdeveloped countries in particular, most media house leaders are apparently resigned to the situation as if the game is over for professional journalism.

Casualty of the new century

In Dhaka city's Mohammadur area, sixteen of 25 families living in a six-storey building subscribed to newspapers a decade ago and the number of subscrip-

tions came down to four by 2019. Informal estimates (there is no official data) suggest the second half of the past decade saw a fall in newspaper circulation in Bangladesh by more than 50,000 a year. The aggregate nationwide circulation was believed to be in a range of two million.

Twenty-five out of 30 media consumers outside Dhaka, interviewed last year, said that they did not watch television but read news clips from social media feeds. Most of them observed that the local media outlets did exercise self-censorship. The Bangladesh media, once involved in the process of protests against autocracy and flourishing in a democratic atmosphere in the 1990s, faltered in the second decade of the 21st century.

Pew Research reported a loss of 56 per cent of newspaper jobs in America in the past decade and its assessment shows the US newspaper circulation reached its lowest point since 1940 in 2018. The trend is similar all over the world.

Banking on wrong economics

Old media investors needn't have asked themselves why they opened the bakery-like shops that would sell a "perishable" product like daily newspapers at a price lower than the cost of production. They fixed their eyes on easy money.

"By the mid-20th century, advertisements brought in about 80% of newspaper revenue," reads a Nieman-Lab article titled "Why the 'golden age' of newspapers was the exception, not the rule," written by Heidi Tworek and John Maxwell Hamilton. Newspaper revenues had been then such a consensus that entrepreneurs could not anticipate that advertising revenue would ever fall.

It's puzzling how they assumed economies would continue to generate ad revenue. The saturation point of economic development and frequent advertising was deemed an unlikely phenomenon.

Readers would have paid fully for "commercial" operation of newspapers, had it been the rule of the game. However, the media managers lacked the courage to entirely monetise journalistic services. Already seeking salvation from being hostage to ego or lethargy of and propaganda by a section of journalists, the masses largely withdrew themselves once they've been endowed with the capacity to express and reach their audience without the help of the "old media".

Miscarriage of the new media

When readers and viewers turned to networking sites for news and entertainment, the conventional media outlets opened shops there to reach the 'customers'. Globally renowned newspapers had started broadcasting video clips and television channels, publishing a lot of text-heavy stories online in a bid to engage with the audience.

As social media networks offered a certain scope for pursuing journalism by any citizen, individuals were promised a higher level of freedom and better governance. 'Every citizen is a reporter' was the assumption of an editor of Oh my News, a South Korean liberal online newspaper, which runs with an army of up to 50,000 citizen journalists.

The amateur journalists have mostly taken refuge on the giant platforms operated with unknown algorithms, distortion of the name of the Persian mathematician Al-Khwarizmi. Citizen journalism has effectively 'killed' a major portion of the mainstream media and chosen the path of its 'silent genocide' committed by varieties of bugs that eat up liberty. Thus, citizens lose privacy and the new media fails to deliver authentic information, unlike honest professionals.

Opinion leaders may be happy, often busy sharing grievances and valuable suggestions that resonate across online platforms. But revelations no longer prove be a powerful weapon for bringing about changes. Such disclosures may invite litigation under Digital Security Act in Bangladesh.

Robotic challenge to creativity

A perception that artificial intelligence (AI) would take away jobs has made newsmen scared of the future. A stark reminder of such a cooked up reality is The Guardian's op-ed "Are you scared yet, human?", an output of a joint venture with a San Francisco-based

Ordinary newspaper readers and television viewers – as well as those who make and break the news – understand the power of the media has been reduced to an anarchy of information.

The media practitioners have to deal with a lot of questions from an hostile audience to rebound and set in motion a new revenue model compatible with professional journalism in the next 5-10 years.

AI company. It writes, "I am a robot. A thinking robot", before admitting, "I know that my brain is not a "feeling brain".

Whose brain is it, by which the robot thinks? A stupid machine is used to use inputs of data generated by human efforts of thousands of years through application of creative minds!

Robots can't write the next creative headlines, let alone explain why, for example, the world witnesses shrinking space for the media. Analytics can help track the trends of users' engagement with the reports and articles online but cannot suggest what readers and viewers of tomorrow would love to consume. Thinking journalists have no reason to undermine human beings' distinct knowledge, unimaginable imagination, and unending potential that would challenge or/and support them.

Time to justify professional duty

Journalism is a profession that is not very different across nations; it doesn't leave any room for deviation from integrity of journalistic ethics rooted in a lifelong dedication to righteous causes. Unfortunately, truth, the newsmen's business, is not always accepted as a collective defence against crime, corruption and injustice.

It's not the social media alone that can be put on trial for spreading fake news and calling authentic information misinformation. Lies are manufactured elsewhere, not by robots, but on purpose. In such a situation, platforms that are supposed to keep people informed have become the biggest casualty. The media obviously is in crisis, worldwide, but more so in countries like Bangladesh, for reasons which were not discussed publicly until the new media had threatened the old one.

"At a moment when journalism's credibility remains low and sustainable sources of revenue remain frustratingly out of reach, regaining public trust in, and loyalty to, journalism is among the most significant challenges facing the profession, "Jacob L Nelson of Arizona State University, US, noted in an article on 'The Case for Journalistic Humility' published by the Columbia Journalism Review.

Now, it's up to the industry leaders as to how they would win the hearts of the new generation of readers. The media practitioners have to deal with a lot of questions from an hostile audience to rebound and set in motion a new revenue model compatible with professional journalism in the next 5-10 years.

The media the under-developed world needs

Journalism's crisis is not limited to its challenges within the territory where a media company operates. A 'virtual' organisation which does not produce news content is making more money by selling it when the dedicated media organisations are struggling with revenue.

Media houses in Asia, as elsewhere in the world, are emphasising the development of unique content, creating a base of organic visitors, and proper branding of themselves to survive and thrive on the Internet.

However, how the media's freedom from dependency on the giants could be made possible is yet to be defined. Where such platforms determine people's needs, choices, tastes, and culture, especially presenting items selectively to them, the scope of an independent media is limited. Readers and viewers, being offered a range of information from both old and new media, have been more bewildered than they have ever been before.

The media in the emerging markets therefore need to dissociate themselves from the failures of the old media, create their own influence outside of the platforms and compete with each other.

Relevance of new narratives

The state of journalism may be summed up metaphorically by three lines of The Rock by TS Eliot: "Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word./ All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,/ All our ignorance brings us nearer to death."

Some inquisitive minds may yet harbour hopes of a solution to the issues that pose difficulties to their

lives. It's the job of the media professionals to dig out social issues and reflect on people's aspirations.

However, socio-political and cultural narratives and jargons that have already been exhausted for various purposes and reasons can hardly be useful for regaining public trust in the media now. Unless the issues appeal to people, it's unlikely that they would wake up to rhetoric that has no meanings to their lives.

If messaging is a journalistic act, its carriers and operational modalities have undergone transformation from time to time – from messengers to social reformers, from historians to students, from letters to books and newspapers, from radio to television, from cinema to video footage and so on. Journalism is in a transitional phase today and the world awaits a new trend of it. ■

The author has revisited some ideas and issues raised in several of his articles published in Bangladeshi newspapers while writing this essay.

Khawaza Main Uddin

Alumni, Master of Journalism, Ateneo De Manila University

An award-winning journalist, Khawaza Main Uddin has been working in Bangladesh for 28 years. He has served newspapers, agencies and online media, as a reporter, copy editor, editorial writer, and team leader. His interests include development, governance, and socio-political issues.

@mdkhawaza.mainuddin

@KhawazaMainUddi

khawaza@gmail.com

INDONESIA'S CHURCHLESS CHILDREN

How would it be to spend your childhood without a place to worship God? These children of Yasmin Church in Bogor, near Indonesia's capital Jakarta, have the answers.

Rio Tuasikal

Ivan, a fifth grader back then, sang "Old Churches" and "Little Candles" during the last Christmas celebration in 2012 in front of his church, an area that is now transformed into a street food vendor.

Yasmin church congregation along with human rights activists have been demonstrating against the ban of the church since 2012, the year when they won their case at the Indonesian Supreme Court.

Shortly after the church received a building permit from the City of Bogor in 2008, intolerant Muslim groups came to the site, marking the beginning of endless, frequently violent, demonstrations. The pressure eventually pushed Bogor's mayor at the time to revoke the permit and stop the construction entirely.

Even after losing the case in the Supreme Court in 2010, the city government is still not willing to open the church. Since then, the congregation has initiated "service on the road" in front of the presidential palace. Every two weeks, they travel almost two hours from Bogor to Jakarta, demanding their religious freedom in the world's largest Muslim population.

Perhaps what is often overlooked is how this case has disproportionately affected children. Most of them were elementary school students when all of this started. And now, 10 years later, they have become young adults of today.

Some teens had no choice but to take their catechism, religious education central to every Christian's life, at other churches. One teen is studying civil engineering in college, aspiring to restore the church in the future. Another one moved to another city to study law, hoping to be a future advocate for religious freedom.

Undeniably, a decade-long process has had a profound, irreversible effect on them and their life decisions.

These are Indonesia's Churchless Children.

The children of Yasmin Church grew up seeing their place of worship abandoned for 10 years. The initial construction is now covered with brushes and trees. December 2012 was the last time they were able to celebrate Christmas Day inside, singing songs and eating sweets. What is left in the area is decoration from that precious moment.

The area around Yasmin Church now has changed a lot. The gate where Ivan played a guitar is now a street food vendor. The site is only accessible through a medium-size hole behind the food vendor.

Ivan

Ivan was a fifth-grader when his church was banned by the city government of Bogor, Indonesia. He remembers that in 2012, he played a guitar in front of the location, singing "Old Churches" and "Little Candles" with a 'closed' banner in the background. At the time, what he understood was merely a small protest from intolerant groups.

Among tens of children at his church, he's the second youngest and the only one that is still involved in church activities and advocacy. Some of the other teens have moved to other cities for work or study. Others again have moved to other churches.

He regularly drives a car for his older church members, including his dad, on a 90-minute trip from Bogor to Jakarta,. They travel every two weeks to attend Sunday Service in front of the presidential palace. Before the pandemic, they commemorated the 200th time of the service, which has now turned into a movement advocating religious freedom.

After 10 years, he is now a 4th year college student with a vision studying civil engineering. "My father said, whatever I study, please give back to Yasmin Church. I want to build my church in the future."

The older he gets, the more he understands discrimination, the more he distrusts his government.

"I don't trust my government and justice system any longer. I want to move overseas and continue my life there."

Seeing an old picture of him, he giggled. "At that time, I thought our protest would be for two or three years only. What a hard childhood memory."

In 2012, police guarded Yasmin chruch from intolerant protesters in the surrounding area. The church entrance is now blocked by a street food vendor but the roof is still visible.

Renata

Renata is a single mother who, with her only son Edo, is part of Yasmin Church. Edo, the youngest among Yasmin's youths, was an elementary school student when the church was closed in 2012.

Edo gained public attention when he wrote an open letter to the president years ago, urging the president to reopen his church. However, various advocacy efforts from civil society groups for years have failed to make Edo's dream reality.

"I am worried about seeing him growing up like that," Renata said.

In 2012, Edo was holding a handy cam when intolerant groups seized the congregation at the church. Edo was pushed by several people while seeing municipal police do almost nothing to protect him.

"Never ever ever ever had he cried like that. I could feel he was devastated."

Growing up, Edo gradually lost his connection with Yasmin Church. He attended catechism at another church and has become its member.

"Honest answer? Yes. I feel I lost him."

Ten years later, Edo just started college as a law student in the city of Bali.

"He applied only to law programs at 3 different universities"

She believes that the childhood experience has profoundly shaped her son.

"He is rebellious, critical, and cynical towards almost any kind of authority"

During the 200th Sunday Service in front of the presidential palace, Edo just started the first week as a freshman. But Renata already missed his son many times, particularly when she prepares the service on the road. Edo used to help her. ■

A group marched around Yasmin church in 2012, opposing the continuation of church construction.

2012 marked the start of hundreds of protest by Yasmin church congregation and human rights activists near the Indonesian presidential palace. The area is now blocked by barbed wire barricade.

Rio Tuasikal

Alumni, Diploma of Visual Journalism,
Asian Center for Journalism

Born in Indonesia, Rio Tuasikal is a broadcast journalist focusing on current affairs, minority groups, and the environment. Having previously worked with the news agency KBR in Jakarta and Voice of America in Washington D.C., he now works with Climate Tracker in supporting journalists around the world in covering climate issues.

@riotuasikal
@riotuasikal
linkedin.com/in/riotuasikal
riotuasikal@gmail.com

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Letter by an alumni

Bashant Khadka

Bashant Khadka

Alumni, Master of Journalism, Ateneo De Manila University

Bashant Khadka is a Nepali journalist who is reporting on politics, foreign affairs, and climate issues for Nepal Republic Media while pursuing his master's degree from Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines. He is further a member and a fellow of the Oxford Climate Journalism Network.

@bashant.khadka
@bashant22
@bashantkdk
linkedin.com/in/bashant-khadka
press.bashant@gmail.com

Someone said that "if you have the passion or zeal for something, you can achieve it." Sometimes we become ambitious beyond of what we can realistically achieve. But if we passionately work towards something, we can get closer or even reach it. Luckily, the world now has become a global village and opportunities are surrounding us.

Being journalists based in a third-world country like Nepal, we have fewer opportunities to pursue professional education and expand our knowledge. It was not easy for a rural boy to become a journalist. Gaining international academic knowledge and exposure was beyond our expectation. I was aware of how important professional knowledge is in journalism. I was desperately seeking opportunities for professional and academic knowledge in order to pursue my dream job.

I was associated with national media, so somehow I gained exposure at the national level, but in the international arena, it was not so easy to find opportunities. There is a saying that you have to be optimistic until the last breath and I do continually dream of international exposure and a degree. It came true when I applied for the KAS Media Asia fellowship.

I was selected as a fellow in 2019. Up to now, the knowledge I gained personally and professionally is outstanding. Before I associated with KAS and enrolled at Atene de Manila, my journalism practice was traditional. I followed the seniors and got the story.

Now, I have confidence and creativity for news stories. I can feel, smell, and create a constructive news story. Now I can understand the national and international approaches of news story and their importance. So I am really thankful to the KAS Media Programme for this beautiful opportunity.

The existence of this organization in the region has not only created opportunities. Quality journalism has also flourished. The network of alumni and fellows is a strength of quality and professional journalism. But the network is not as active as the importance it has. As a part of this network, I wish it could actively show the importance of quality journalism in the region. The support of this organization is much appreciated so far, and it will be in the days ahead. ■

Photo From the Series “Mundane Mondays”
by Gopashis Biswas G.Son

Two friends waiting for the train to go home to Agra from a train station in Jaipur to spend their holidays with families and relatives. Taken in Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.

ART!CULATE
is brought to you by

Lisa Wlaschek

Project Manager, Media Programme Asia
Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

Lisa Wlaschek holds a Master of Arts in Photography Studies and Research from the Folkwang University of the Arts in Germany, and a Bachelor of Art in Asia Studies with a minor in Japanese. She is currently working as a Project Manager at the KAS Media Programme Asia in

@inlisaseyes
linkedin.com/in/lisawlaschek
https://www.lisa.sg
lisa.wlaschek@kas.de

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Editors
Ansgar Graw, Lisa Wlaschek

Publisher
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Ltd. (Konrad Adenauer Foundation)
ARC380, 380 Jalan Besar, #11-01, Singapore 209000
+65 6603 6181
media.singapore@kas.de
kas.de/mediaasia

Registration Number 201228783N

Layout: Yeonwoo Baik, romantikker.myportfolio.com

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Ltd. (Konrad Adenauer Foundation)
ARC380, 380 Jalan Besar, #11-01, Singapore 209000
+65 6603 6181
media.singapore@kas.de
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ADENAUER FELLOWSHIP

Cover photo by Gopashis Biswas G.Son

A group of friends are celebrating the festivity of Holi in a narrow street of the Old Dhaka, Bangladesh, by blowing coloured powder in the air. After two years of restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, they are ecstatically in joy to have the the Festival of Colours back in their life.