
Forum

HENRY CHANG

Give 'new kid on the block' a fair chance

JOURNALISM lecturer Sorariba Nash's article, **A free ride to propaganda** in *Pacific Journalism Review* (#1:1, November 1994, pp 73-87), is an example of blind, steel-trap tenacity.

When he first read his paper to the Journalism Education Association at its 1-3 December 1993 conference he would have had, at the very most (and assuming he wrote his paper the night before the conference), the benefit of being able to analyse the sum total of 14 issues of *The National*. Yet Mr Nash had already judged. I am surprised that anyone involved with journalism can be so negative, disinterested when, so to speak, there is a new kid on the block.

Instead of keeping an open mind on the 'second newspaper' he added his voice to nothing new or different that people like Pinder [*Times of PNG* columnist] and the noise-makers in the

[*Post-Courier's*] Drum column had not already scare-mongered about before the newspaper was launched.

In the revision of his paper, presumably sometime in October 1994, Mr Nash would have had the opportunity to analyse many months, if not a full year, of publication of *The National*. He obviously did not take the trouble.

He says: '*The National* was a disappointment. It failed to meet the expectations of Papua New Guinea readers.' Could Mr Nash give readers of *PJR* the benefit of the poll or research he conducted that yielded this firm conclusion? Or was that his own personal view?

Then he says: 'A few months after its launching, *The National*, from time to time, was splashing headlines and using pictures from events far away from PNG on the front pages despite its claims that it represented the voice of Papua New Guineans.' His logic and understanding of newspapers escape me.

Is he saying that it is wrong for a newspaper to carry anything foreign on its front page? Is he implying that readers here deserve only domestic news and information? Is he saying that a newspaper that wants to speak for PNG is disqualified from doing so

if 'from time to time' (when there is news value) it splashes something 'foreign' on its front page? Is he advocating that Papua New Guineans should shut themselves off from the rest of the world? Mr Nash would have PNG live under a toadstool.

And, unbelievably, he complains: 'Both papers (*The National* and *Post-Courier*) often publish identical wire stories.'

Mr Nash goes to some lengths — even after several months of being able to 'taste' *The National's* reportage — to discredit the local reporting, and in particular that of my deputy, Frank Senge Kolma. His comments are personal, petty and prejudiced.

He questions the motive of *The National's* publisher, Pacific Star, thus: 'If anything, here is a business venture that involved Papua New Guineans and is a front for the logging company's public relations so that it remains in the good books of the Government while the exploitation of PNG's forest resources continues.' Again, can he give us the evidence since the paper's launch to back his 'front' theory?

Does he really think that exploitation of PNG's forest resources will not continue if *The National* did not come on the scene, if 'the logging company' does not have access to public relations (not *The National*)? Come, come. Forest exploitation is a matter of national policy. The political masters must decide that.

Mr Nash misrepresents Frank Kolma's report giving an account of

how the meeting between Mr Wingti and the Datuk resulted in the setting up of the newspaper. It said nothing about there being 'no other interested parties' for the project — just that 'there was much talk but nothing happened'. Sure, there were many interested parties, including ex-staffers of *Niugini Nius*. Everybody knows that. But one party was willing to put up the money.

He charges that the question whether Datuk Tiong's group has no media business was 'never considered seriously'. This implies no less than that the Prime Minister of the day, Paias Wingti, was hoodwinked — conned and tricked in some high level conspiracy!

He deems it 'highly suspicious' that the founding editor of *The National* is not from *Sin Chew Jit Poh*. 'Henry Chang was brought in from *The Straits Times* of Singapore. 'Why should that be suspicious? Competency in language is necessary in newspaper editing? *Sin Chew* is Chinese language-based; it obviously would have to look outside itself for an English-language editor.

Hongkong's Chinese *Daily News* group employed a British journalist to edit its new English newspaper. Does that mean that the media business expertise of that giant publishing house is highly suspicious as well? By extension of this logic it would seem that the world's most highly suspicious group would have to be Rupert Murdoch's.

Mr Nash pronounces *The National's* reporting of PNG Holdings 'not

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an honest analysis at all'. I might say the same of his paper which displays an intellectual dishonesty in its judgement of *The National*.

May I suggest that when Mr Nash next revises his paper he takes a longer and harder look, with both eyes open.

Unlike him, I know — and I am very confident our readers as well — that after publishing for 15 months *The National* has proven its mettle. It is not perfect, it has lapses but it is none of what Mr Nash imagines. *The National* has given journalism in Papua New Guinea something of a quality that can stand alongside the best in the Asia-Pacific.

I, of course, must promptly declare that I am prejudiced, lest Mr Nash accuses me of intellectual dishonesty.

Henry Chang
Editor-in-chief

The National

Waigani

Papua New Guinea

Editor: *The original letter was unsigned and returned to The National for signing. Mr Chang left The National in June 1995 and was replaced as editor-in-chief by Frank Senge Kolma, a former Press Secretary of previous Prime Minister Paias Wingti.*

This letter has been edited to remove potentially defamatory passages. The senior editors of The National were invited to contribute articles to Pacific Journalism Review both last year and this year. They did not take up the offer.

Sorariba Nash replies:

I will not go into greater detail to answer any defamatory passages directed at me as a person and the office I represent. Neither will I rise to defend my ability as a teacher in the journalism profession which has come under question. Let my colleagues and students pronounce their own verdict.

I have nothing against the senior editors of the The National. If I have made my criticisms appear personal, petty, prejudiced and 'paranoid jealousy' as they are led to believe, then I will make it my duty to correct that. I have no reason to be jealous of any of the editorial staff. I am happy with what I do, and I will not apologise. And I will not throw back the mud.

In a way, I am happy because the senior editors of the The National have gone to the trouble of reading my paper — line for line, word for word. Even the reference notes. I am happy to accept that in their critique it was pointed out that one of my old papers was included out of place as a source of reference. I acknowledge that. That particular paper, 'Official threat to freedom of mass media in Papua New Guinea', was presented in 1993, not 1992.

What I have done here is simply used my right to freedom of expression which is constitutionally guaranteed.

My complaint about giving pictures/headlines to foreign stories/captions on the front page were based on observing the earlier issues of The National.

I still maintain that both The National and the Post-Courier don't cover PNG thoroughly — full stop!

Again, I will not refrain from speaking against such national policies that enable foreign companies to exploit PNG's forest resources. Neither do I accuse anybody of 'intellectual dishonesty'. It is 'I' who has been accused of 'intellectual dishonesty'.

If the editors of The National want to settle the question of 'dishonesty' once and for all, the onus is on them to provide a full length, comprehensive paper — to put things into perspective or 'honesty' as they would prefer.

Tabloid transition

Congratulations on the transition of *Uni Tavour* to newsprint and tabloid. It looks and feels like a true newspaper.

Pacific Journalism Review is also very good. I especially like Sorariba Nash's piece on propaganda trends. I also found interesting Margaret Obi's Forum comments on PNG's National Information and Communication Policy.

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Ancient Remingtons

With *Pacific Journalism Review* and *Uni Tavour*, your program has come a long way in 20 years, though it's hard to think *Uni Tavour* has been alive so

long. I remember when Peter Henshall and I took it over from Alan Chatterton — the students were still hammering out copy on ancient Remingtons and sticking it to the page with Gloy.

It now looks so professional and is a real credit to you all.

David Ingram
National Training Manager
SBS Radio
Sydney, Australia

World-class education

Enclosed please find my subscription for *Pacific Journalism Review*, the first 'home grown' academic journal on Pacific media to be launched in the region.

As to the new-look *Uni Tavour*, words cannot express the depth and breadth of change your students have wrought. Let me just say that they must be getting a world-class education in the profession, and thank them for putting out a paper full of hard news about important developments in the PNG media that I can use here in my classes on international journalism.

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