

PACIFIC INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AWARD 1

What the judges said

Sponsored by the South Pacific Centre for Communication and Information in Development (SPCenCIID), the new annual Pacific Investigative Journal has been established to promote higher standards in investigative reporting and to foster good relationships between journalists.



INVESTIGATIVE journalism is alive and well in the Pacific news media. The quality and breadth of reporting taking place in the South Pacific region is reflected in the high standard of stories entered in the first Pacific Investigative Journalism Award. Pressures for economic reform, development and democratisation are creating societies in change, providing a feast of potential issues needing in-depth reporting to the public. Stories that reinforce the public's right to be informed; stories that investigate hard-to-get facts and give the public a new perspective on events and issues; stories that carry a wealth of detail about how the society works are the stories that uphold the finest traditions of investigative journalism.

The judges found that all the eligible stories entered in the award, displayed the Pacific media's awareness of the importance of the watchdog role that the media has over society. In refining the criteria — 'an investigative report that has made a significant contribution to Pacific regional public awareness, or changed the public agenda in an individual Pacific nation over an important issue' — for judging the award, the judges examined the stories using three categories:

- The importance of the issue covered and significance to the society in which it is published.
- The use of investigative techniques and skills in establishing the facts of the story.
- The story-telling ability of the journalist in making the issue accessible

The judges

DAVID McKNIGHT: The award-winning author of *Australia's Spies and their Secrets* and lectures in investigative journalism at the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism, UTS.



PETER CRONAU: Director of the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism at the University of Technology, Sydney, and an investigative journalist with an interest in Pacific region affairs.



WENDY BACON: An investigative journalist and lawyer, Associate Professor Bacon is the head of the department of social communication and journalism at the University of Technology, Sydney.



to the reading public.

While all of the stories judged were impressive, three stories stood out in the minds of the judges as being excellent investigative journalism, and one in particular.

Winner: The winner of the award for 1996 is Yashwant Gaunder's report published in the July 1995 edition of *The Review* news magazine of Fiji, on the failings of the National Bank of Fiji that revealed the bank's doubtful loans of F\$120 million. The article pieced together the maze of relevant facts, unearthed new information, and interviewed major players in the matter, to provide the reader with a compelling account of corruption and incompetence within country's major financial institution. The journalist used a range of investigative techniques from relentless pursuit of a wide range of sources, to researching companies and individuals associated with the bank. The story added to the public understanding of a major political and business crisis in Fiji society.

The judges also commended two other articles in the award.

Commended: Dominic Kakas, in Papua New Guinea's *The Independent* on 22 July 1995, revealed substantial evidence that a Malaysian logging company operating in PNG had purchased a K335,000 house for the use of the

YASHWANT GAUNDER

then Forests Minister. The story showed that Forests Minister Andrew Posai was occupying a house provided by a company associated with the controversial Malaysian logging company Rimbunan Hijau. The story displayed a courageous and tenacious attitude to pursue information about a matter of vital public interest. The journalist has displayed a fine understanding of how basic investigative techniques can expose important matters to the public gaze. The article exposed a tale of corruption that opens a view into the heart of PNG's politics and business.

Commended: The second story commended by the judges was Ilaitia Turagabeci and Asaeli Lave's report in *The Fiji Times* on 16 March 1996, of a village using income from marijuana to finance needed community projects. The story impressed the judges as it dealt with the issue of illegal cropping of marijuana not in the usual framework of 'crime'. The newspaper also withstood the pressure brought to bear on it from government and the police force. It upheld a crucial principle of journalism: the upholding of the professional secrecy of the source of information obtained in confidence. The journalists involved in this story put in the hard slog to investigate the story on the ground, and reported with a refreshing understanding of the reasons for the villagers breaking the law.

The judges noted the absence of any entries from the non-print media and suggest that journalists in radio and TV be encouraged to enter the next award. Also the judges recommend that all reports should be submitted in good quality photocopy or tear-out form rather than fax, and radio and TV entries should be accompanied by transcripts of the items.

Each item should also detail full attributions for information in stories, where this is not provided in the published/broadcast stories themselves. The entries in the inaugural Pacific Investigative Journalism Award are in the best traditions of investigative journalism, and uphold the highest principles of quality journalism in informing the public.

□ *The deadline for the 1997 award is March 31 (see entry details on Page 174).*