

INVESTIGATORS CUM SCIENTISTS IN THE NEWS INDUSTRY: A STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING

by Dr. Faridah Ibrahim, Ph.D

School of Media and Communication Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
E-mail: fbi@pkrisc.cc.ukm.my

Introduction

The nature of the environment in which we are living is undergoing constant changes. These changes could be due to natural environmental imbalances and occurrences, or challenges which are man-made. Whether we are conscious of it or not, now and then issues of environmental imbalances get to us via the media of communication. As we watch the television news bulletins and as we glance through the news headlines, some environmental issues passed by without us looking at them a second time. However, occasionally some do spark our interest and emotions such as Tsunamis, earthquakes, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions and other natural catastrophes that cause the loss of thousands of lives. Other environmental issues also captivate our interests. And most times we will be angered by environmental issues caused by man and human errors and insensitivities.

For instance the haze problem that constantly put us in a daze. We are angered by irresponsible acts of individuals from neighbouring countries who are occasionally causing our country's haze index to escalate. We are angered by irresponsible acts of fellow citizens who are involved in illegal logging causing imbalances in the natural environment that trigger flash floods, soil erosion and landslides. Indeed, we are easily angered when we read that there are no more

rivers and seas where we can go for our holidays because our favourite rivers, waterfalls and seaside resorts are polluted and contaminated by industrial wastes and toxins.

And every time we read about these issues in the newspapers or watch them on television, we are always angered by the ways the issues are handled by the relevant authorities. It is as though the media are making a lot of fuss over nothing. But sometimes we are disappointed with the journalists and media organizations for not being able to get the relevant authorities to take immediate actions. This is one of the most pressing problems faced by the environmental journalists. Most environmental news investigative in nature and almost all need immediate remedial steps to be taken by the relevant authorities.

As well as revealing much about the importance of environmental issues and the nature of news value attach to the issues, looking at the coverage of environmental issues by selected media, in this case two mainstream newspapers such as *Utusan Malaysia* and *New Straits Times*, will tell us something about how the media and the news people treat environmental issues and about the societies in which they operate. This paper argues that while there is increasing concern for environmental issues among journalists, government and societies, the extent of coverage on environmental issues in the newspapers shows a different trend.

Environmental Reporting

The tremendous urban development in states and capital cities in many countries has seen contamination of the environment reaching staggering and alarming proportions. Sometimes this contamination is the result of human error and hurried industrialization. Such industrialization may be by the government themselves, by local private enterprises, or even by foreign companies.

It is a sad truth that countries have to harm their environment in order to develop. For the sake of development, sometimes these countries have

to put aside the heavy price they pay in the form of human problems caused by industrial pollutants and cancer-causing agents.

Some other environmental issues as identified by Sharon and Kenneth A. Friedman in their book *Reporting on the environment: A handbook for journalists* (1988) include acid rain, deforestation, soil erosion and landslide, the greenhouse effect, overfishing, the thinning of the ozone layer, radiation, toxic chemicals and metals, toxic wastes, pesticides and the like. These are issues that seldom escape the sensitive eyes and ears of environmental journalists.

In Malaysia, major environmental issues that have been covered over the years by the mass media are issues of haze, deforestation and illegal logging which are the major cause of flashfloods, soil erosion and landslides, illegal dumping of toxic chemicals, water pollution and management of radioactive wastes. Issues of radioactive wastes management, for instance, is considered serious as Dr Hans Blix (1997), the Director General of The International Atomic Energy (IAEA) stated that no technology, no matter how beneficial, can be considered truly sustainable unless the waste and by-products that it generates can be managed safely.

Although the nuclear activities in Malaysia are limited to the applications of such technologies in the industrial, medical, agricultural, and environmental sectors, the long history of tin mining activities and oil extraction in this country did generate a sizable volume of radioactive waste, namely *amang*, the byproduct of tin mining and certain toxic sludges from oil extraction (*The Star*, 22 October 1996).

What is *Amang*? *Amang* is a sand-like byproduct of tin mining. The material is processed in amang factories to recover residual tin ore and other types of minerals such as ilmenite, monozite, xenotime and zircon. These elements are further processed such as the cracking of monozite to extract other useful materials called “rare earth” elements such as yttrium and cerium – which was what the controversial Asian Rare Earth factory in Bukit Merah, Perak, did in the early 80’s. The processing resulted in sludges containing significant amounts

of “naturally occurring radioactive materials” – NORMs – such as uranium and thorium. NORMs are harmless in their natural state as they are mixed with soil and thus in low concentrations. Once dug up, however, they become concentrated and are known as “technologically enhanced naturally occurring materials” – TENORMs – which have higher radioactivity and must be properly disposed of. TENORMs are similarly released during oil exploration and extraction and are contained in sludges (<http://www.mint.gov.my>)

Only the scientists and individuals in the relevant organizations know about *Amang*. And members of the public will never know about the radioactive wastes in Bukit Merah if the media have not highlighted the issue. It is the role of environmental journalist to keep up a continuous effort to inform and educate the public about the environment. But getting information about the environment is not always easy. This is because of the complexity of the issues which need lots of rigorous checking and digging for facts and figures. In other words, the process of facts and news gathering is akin to investigation. Good environmental reporting requires journalists to assemble concrete facts obtained through rigorous investigations.

Sometimes investigations spell danger to the lives of the environmental journalists. In this case their plight to unveil truth may jeopardize the future and survival of a lucrative business and this definitely does not make owners of business happy. Because of the danger usually associated with investigative works such as those performed by investigative and environmental reporters, we do not see many environmental journalists. In Malaysia for instance, we do not see many Karam Singh Walliah's around – Karam is an environmental TV journalist working with the Malaysian private station, TV3. Because of his profound work in environmental journalism, Karam was awarded best environmental journalist by the media industry in 2003 and 2004. One of the environmental issues uncovered by Karam was the illegal land clearing on Cameron Highland. After getting a complaint from his friend, he began investigating. After digging for sources, checking on people involved and arousing concern and commitment from the State government and even the Sultan and Tengku Mahkota of Pahang, he

successfully uncovered the corruption involved at the district and land office in Cameron Highlands (*New Straits Times* 11 October 2000). Apart from TV3, *The Star* has also been seen as a proponent of environmental issues through the writings of Tan Cheng Lee, an experienced environmental reporter. The Utusan Malaysia group has established the special investigative unit called *Unit Tindakan Khas* (UTK) in their editorial department since 2004 and had exposed environmental issues involving the Bukit Cahaya deforestation in Shah Alam, to make way for housing development and the illegal production of VCDs.

On the Bukit Cahaya Seri Alam Agricultural Park fiasco in February 2005, Jacob George, President of Consumers Association of Subang Jaya and Shah Alam (CASSA) wrote (Malaysiakini.com 22 February 2005): “it took an *Utusan Malaysia* report and a sharp response from Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to push politicians, policymakers, civil servants and others to come up with statements on the 800ha park– the world’s biggest agro-forest – which is fast becoming an ‘island’ with surrounding areas being developed for housing.”

Why does environmental journalism requires investigative work? Basically to unveil the roots of certain phenomena, be it positive or negative, some probing and digging for facts and information need to be done. It is easy to unveil positive issues. But to unveil negative ones, especially those that often cause problems to societies, such as contamination of the environment due to malpractices or illegal operations and the like, deforestation causing soil erosion and flash floods, unethical activities and so on, may require a deeper probing and thorough investigation. This is because journalists involved in investigations of “hidden” facts and unknown phenomena are not just dealing with specific events, but process reporting that requires journalists to deal with processes that look at ongoing actions, trends, causes and effects. It is definitely not easy work..

The job of an environmental journalist requires him or her to dig for hidden facts. For instance when there is a landslide, an environmental

journalist will not just report the incident but will go further to find out what causes the landslide – could it be an act of nature or the landslide is caused by massive soil erosion due to some irresponsible act of human being. This kind of digging for facts require environmental journalists to use investigative reporting techniques.

Investigation and The News

The activity of investigation is usually associated with the work of a spy or super detective whose main aim in life is “turning over rocks to see what vermin crawl out from under.” When utilized in news writing, the techniques of investigation will ensure a complete, holistic and detailed presentation of facts. Many people think of investigative reporters as hard bitten cynics, super detectives or crusaders or even bloodhounds constantly on the trail of vice, crime, corruption and human frailties. In modern day journalism, the infamous Watergate Scandal that led to the resignation of a U.S President, Richard Nixon in 1974, marked the works of two investigative reporters, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward of the *Washington Post*.

Basically investigative reporting differs greatly with routine reporting. It is undertaken with the idea that some actions should result and that some changes should be made. And this is also what the environmental journalists aspire to do. Hence, the investigative reporting techniques could sometimes be a suitable way to handle environmental reporting. However, investigative reporting is a type of journalism which is not easy to do anywhere – be it in the developed countries or the Third World, says journalism scholar Al Hester (1987). It is even harder to do in many Third World countries where many of the press systems are an integral part of the national government. And even if the press is independent of the government, the idea of “investigating” anything is always not well received.

What is investigative reporting? The word “investigative” conjures a stereotypical image of a detective and his activities in Hollywood movies, Bollywood or even Mollywood (the label used for Malaysian

film industry). But unlike the detectives in these movies, the reporters who investigate on issues do not possess fire arms or weapons or even special warrant to arrest criminals. All that they have apart from their wits and intelligence are their pens and papers, perhaps laptops, and they are on their way to shake the world - to expose about wrongdoings, corruption, conspiracies, malpractices and other irresponsible acts. It is indeed a dangerous mission, but nevertheless a task that will be executed by reporters with the endorsement of their organizations. Hence, reporters must learn quickly that they should not attempt controversial investigations without the sanction of their organization. If they do, and if the investigative project backfires, they may find themselves becoming sacrificial lambs.

In terms of news presentation, an investigative piece is in a longer format and takes a longer period to prepare and write since it involves gathering of information from multilevel sources, both primary and secondary, and most of which are hidden facts that need further probing and digging before the “truth” can be finally unveiled.

Almost always an investigative reporting effort takes more resources in the form of additional staff, time and money since the stories are deemed of more than routine importance. Frequently, says Al Hester (1987) the investigative technique is undertaken, not just to do a factual report on a subject, but with the idea that the news stories or news expose will bring actions, change or reforms and that all the wrongs can be corrected.

Hence, we can see that environmental reporting is akin to investigative reporting. Like the investigative piece, environmental news is complex and reporters should not rely on a single source. Often, reporters need to probe for hidden facts and more details before they can really make sense of what is happening and how they should report the issue. The translation of technical jargon is also difficult. And the environmental reporter may find himself with a blind reliance on “experts” who may present “doomsday” findings in pseudo-events such as news conferences orchestrated by the public relations practitioners.

Says environmental reporter of *Los Angeles Times*, Larry Pryor (cited in Gaines and Anderson 1998:88) “Environmental writing is ideally suited to investigative and interpretive reporting. Here the writer turns theorist as well as reporter. He investigates and draws together seemingly unrelated facts into an understandable pattern. This takes time – sometimes months for one story – as well as good sources and the ability to communicate with them on technical topics.”

Many may ask what values do journalists think most important where environmental news is concerned? If one asks members of the public, he will surely get these three responses: sensationalism, negativity and beating the opposition. Yet when one asks the journalists, the answers will be that journalists are motivated by other values; one of these is the “truth”.

To most people, environment is synonymous with pollution of the air and water. With such a narrow definition, environmental issue become so routine and common that it loses its importance and values. Actually environmental news is more than that and has bigger implications. By writing about the environment, the reporters can help promote a broader understanding of ecological sciences and their importance. Besides that, the writings help to show the interrelationships of technical and social knowledge.

Environmental news also forms parts of developmental journalism which Gunaratne (1978) described as an integral part of new journalism that involved “analytical interpretation, subtle investigation, constructive criticism and sincere association with the grassroots.” While Ogan (1982) identified developmental journalism as the critical examination, evaluation and reporting of the relevance, enactment and impact of development programs by the mass media independent of the government.

While there is much research both local and international that has focused on developmental journalism (see for instance Hermant Shah 1990; Griswold and Swenson 1992; Culbertson 1997; Mazanah Mohamad and Ezhar Tamam 1996; Shafer 1998; Murthy 2000; Norzaliza Samiti

2003), there are only a few studies done on environmental reporting.

Norzaliza Samiti (2003) content analysed 4243 developmental news stories covered in *Utusan Malaysia* and *New Straits Times* in the month of May 2002. Her findings show that issues of development pertaining to economy (16.0 percent) is the most frequently covered by both newspapers, followed by 12.6 percent educational development and 9.5 percent political development. The environmental news category only formed 1.0 percent of developmental news covered by the two mainstream papers during the one-month period. The findings showed that both mainstream newspapers do not give much coverage to environmental issues. The situation in Malaysia had not changed where environmental news is concerned since just four years before this study was done, Malaysian journalists who had participated in a CFJ Environmental Journalism program in November 1989 had said that the press coverage of the environment was not only erratic but superficial.

Murthy (2000) studied issues of development news in four Indian dailies over a period of one year. Based on a content analysis study of these newspapers, about 10 development oriented news emerged from the newspapers' coverage and these included issues on health, education, literacy, communication and transportation, agriculture, industries, housing, population programs, energy and ecology. The last two issues (energy and ecology) can be categorized as environmental issues which are among the popular issues covered by the Indian newspapers.

Griswold and Swenson (1993) in their research, "Not in whose backyard? The ethics of reporting environmental issues" looked at four case studies in rural Georgia, United States that focused on the ethical problems which waste disposal and treatment proposals pose for journalists working in rural areas. The cases illustrated the hard choices that journalists face in reporting on environmental issues. Their study found that the media have the potential to play a crucial role in minimising environmental problems but the media in America are not fulfilling that role, partly because of resource shortages and partly because of the ethical orientations traditional to American journalism.

Based on their research, they suggest that journalists should view environmental change as a development issue and adopt the global perspective prevalent in environmental ethics as a way to improve environmental issues such as waste disposal planning.

Brosius and Kepplinger (1990) studied the static and dynamic approaches to agenda setting by looking at cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. They used databases derived from weekly surveys on problem awareness of the public regarding 16 issues and a content analysis of the main German television news shows in 1986. The study reveals no relationship between media coverage and problem awareness under the static analysis. But under dynamic analysis, the findings show that media coverage had caused an increase in problem awareness of four prominent issues in Germany at that time – namely issues of energy supply, defense, environmental protection and European politics. Where issues of environmental protection is concerned, the study indicates that the more coverage of the issues, the higher is the awareness among the German public on the problem attached to the issues.

The Study

A content analysis method, from the qualitative and interpretive perspective was used to explore how two Malaysian mainstream newspapers cover environmental issues and to what extent they prioritise the issues. The newspapers, namely *New Straits Times* (NST) and *Utusan Malaysia* (UM), were systematically selected over a one-month period in June 2005, using Carter's constructed one-week sampling. From the selection, the seven days identified were 2, 4, 9, 14, 18, 24 and 27 June. An in-depth interview with two gatekeepers from both newspapers was conducted to find out how environmental news was treated. Based on the importance of environmental issues to the nation and societies, this study tries to analyse the issue according to the following research questions:

1. How were the environmental issues covered by the two newspapers?

2. What types of environmental news was covered?
3. How do the news gatekeepers treat environmental news?

Findings and Discussions

From the content analysis, it is found that there are not many news stories covered on the environment in spite of the fact that it is considered important. Based on interviews with two gatekeepers from the two newspapers, it was found that environmental news forms part of the development news covered by both newspapers (2003; also see Norzaliza Samiti 2003). Based on a qualitative content analysis study of the newspapers during the one-month period, based on a constructed week, it was found that the English language daily covers more environmental news as compared to the Malay newspaper.

In terms of depth, the study shows that again the English language newspaper had given quite a good coverage of environmental issues whereby one came out on the front page and several other environmental news stories are covered in the prime page, indicating the importance of the issue. The NST also runs an editorial on 18 June 2005 with the headline “Icing without the cake” where the editorial questioned the high budget (RM51.5m) involved in landscaping projects by Kuala Kangsar Municipal Council. NST also ran a full page new story on the landscaping issue on the same day on page 6 Prime News section.

During the study period, NST also ran a couple of articles in the *Letters* column where readers had voiced their grievances, concern or support over some environmental issues. Issues raised include road safety, the spread of birds flu and the Botanical Garden plan by the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM). On June 9th 2005, NST used two AFP news wires on environmental issues on page 10 of the Prime News section, with headlines: “Sumatra faces more threats” and “Tremor sparks panic on island”.

UM’s environmental news stories, most of which were rather short and superficial, covered issues that concerned societal woes on unfinished

projects, for instance news on violators of Bangi Section 4 green areas (*Kawasan hijau Seksyen 4 Bangi diceroboh* – UM May 14th 2005, page 26) and the cracks in Taman Kobena's houses where residents called upon Kuala Lumpur City Hall to take immediate action (*Rumah Taman Kobena retak teruk* – UM May 14th 2005 page 26).

UM tend to run positive environmental news stories that bring great advantage to societies, for instance the news on a new form of solar energy that lights up several islands in Johore (Solar hybrid. *Integrasi kuasa alam dan teknologi* – Page 1, 2 and 3, UM's special pull-out, MEGA, June 9th 2005). Another example is on biotechnology (*Bioteknologi: Teras baru ekonomi* – UM, June 4th 2005) which was published half page broadsheet of a supplementary pull-out, in commemoration of the King's birthday.

UM also showed some interest in other issues pertaining to the environment but the news stories covered were basically hard news of seven to 12 paragraphs stories. The longer features on the environmental issues was those translated from the international news agencies particularly from Reuters and Agence France Press (AFP). Most of the news on environment are informative pieces based on event coverage and not investigative pieces. However, one cannot dismiss the fact that UM is instrumental in uncovering several environmental issues over the past years via investigative reporting, one of the latest expose being the 800ha park in Shah Alam in mid - February 2005.

The findings during the period of study showed that NST had several environmental news stories based on investigation and probing. And the length of news and features was longer. The front page environmental news that came out in NST on June 4th. 2005, was on water pollution with the headline "DIRTY RIVERS. Clean-up warning: The longer we wait, the more we pay". The news which was based on interviews with the Director General of Department of Environment and a scholar from UTM as well as thorough checks on documentation exposed that 55 per cent of Malaysian rivers are polluted by either raw or partially treated sewage.

Types of Environmental News

Basically, both newspapers tend to cover environmental news which is local in content. Except for several long features on environmental issues translated in UM, most of the news was written by the newspapers' own staffs. In terms of types, most of the environmental news in UM and NST are micro in nature which means that the news concern local society, the government and local authorities. Questions of environmental issues raised were those needing immediate remedial steps from the government and local authorities based on local policies and regulations. While only a few news stories were from a macro level perspective involving international bodies and foreign governments, such as the news on tsunami victims covered by UM (Mangsa tsunami terhimpit dek karenah birokrasi 2/6/2005) and NST (Sumatra faces more threats, 9/6/2005 and Tremors spark panic on island, 6/6/2005) which involved aid in the form of funds and research data from world organizations.

Table 1 (UM) and Table 2 (NST) were samples of headlines of environmental news identified from the two newspapers during the constructed one-week period. Looking at the frequencies, it can be seen that there is very little coverage of environmental issues in both newspapers as compared to other news such on economic and politics. In this respect, where environmental news is concerned, the situation has not changed much as compared to the study conducted by Norzaliza Samiti in 2003.

Table 1: Types of news in UM

Date	Headlines	Page Location	Types
18/6/2005	Biopertanian di Malaysia tarik pelaburan	9	Macro
18/6/2005	Jabatan Pertanian diminta wujudkan talian aduan 24 jam	8	Micro
18/6/2005	JLKN tubuh jawatankuasa pantau kualiti makanan	9	Micro
14/6/2005	Kawasan hijau Seksyen 4 Bangi diceroboh	26	Micro

14/6/2005	Ruman Taman Kobena retak teruk	26	Micro
14/6/2005	Padang permainan mesra alam di tengah kesesakan Hong Kong (translated)	24-25	Macro
14/6/2005	Aktiviti puak Nomad ancam Hutan Simpan di India (translated)	26-27	Macro
2/6/2005	Iktiraf bencana alam sebagai ancaman kepada manusia	7	Macro
2/6/2005	Mangsa tsunami terhimpit dek karenah birokrasi (translated)	24-25	Macro
18/6/2005	Pulau Tioman: Kemusnahan bakal menjelang jika tidak dibendung	Mega, 9	Micro
9/6/2005	Solar hybrid – Integrasi kuasa alam dan teknologi	1, 2 & 3	Micro
4/6/2005	Bioteknologi: Teras baru ekonomi	Suplemen- tary 4	Micro
4/6/2005	Panggilan Pulau: Penyertaan orang kampungsemarak program pemuliharaan	Mega 10-11	Micro

Table 2: Types of news in NST

Date	Headline	Page Location	Type
9/6/2005	Sumatra faces more threats	Prime News 10	Macro
9/6/2005	Tremors spark panic on island	Prime News 10	Macro
4/6/2005	Dirty Rivers. Clean-up warning: The longer we wait, the more we pay	Front & 10	Micro
4/6/2005	Ministry to seek RM2b for forest plantation	10	Micro
18/6/2005	Council defends RM51.5m projects	Prime News 6	Micro
18/6/2005	Landscaping projects: What they cost	Prime News 6	Micro

18/6/2005	Pretty big obstruction	Prime News 6	Micro
18/6/2005	Bukit Gasing folks shocked	Prime News 12 & 13	Micro
18/6/2005	Icing without the cake	Editorial 18	Micro
2/6/2005	Lack of enforcement main cause	Letters 21	Micro
2/6/2005	Have closed farms	Letters 21	Micro
2/6/2005	Young ideas to keep Mother Earth	7	Micro
2/6/2005	Technical hitches delay new bridge	33	Micro
2/6/2005	Mid-water trawling study	32	Macro
9/6/2005	Garden of Eden taking shape	20	Micro
9/6/2005	Still no park after 10 years	22	Micro
9/6/2005	Poachers set sight on endangered birds	23	Micro

The News Agenda

Data from the in-depth interviews conducted on two gatekeepers from the two newspaper organizations that have been selected for this study showed a growing concern for environmental news among the editors. An editor with the Utusan Malaysia group said that environmental journalism in Malaysia is still lacking but steps have been taken to increase coverage. He said, “environmental journalism requires investigative works. In my organization, we have set up the Unit Tindakan Khas (UTK) to do investigative pieces on issues pertaining to various issues for instance politics but of late we have focused a lot on consumerism – for instance the illegal VCDs production, societal problems, environmental issues as well as problems raised by the Non-governmental organizations (NGOs).”

He said the investigative team will pick on issues based on complaints, tip-offs, follow-ups and documentation and cited environmental reporting is one type of reporting that requires investigation. He added, “this is because environmental reporting involves in-depth

reporting where reporters need to go further and deeper into the issue, do lots of probing, investigation and interview many people, do lots of observation, survey and study documents...and this will take sometime. We will need a team to do this and not tackle the issue single-handed...”

He cited some of the constraints and obstacles in environmental as well as investigative reporting in this country are the Official Secret Act (OSA), problems of bureaucracies and getting consents for interviews. “Not many people want to open-up ...it’s a risky business... you know”.

Apart from rules and regulations, reporters are frequently confronted with technical and scientific jargon which is associated with environmental reporting. Hence, for environmental reporters, scientific background is an advantage. But an interested reporter can obtain a good knowledge in the field by reading environmental materials published locally and internationally. According to the editor from UM, he will always advice his reporters to read and do a thorough research before they begin their interviews with sources to avoid misinterpretation and misreporting. An editor with the New Straits Times group also stressed the need for more investigative pieces in environmental coverage. “But in any type of coverage, there must always be the official sources...multilevel sources...so that our news are more balanced and more credible,” he stressed.

He also cited the importance of having credible news sources “to add credibility and believability...otherwise readers do not know where the news had come from”. For him, reporters in his newsroom need to learn thoroughly the art of interviewing and digging for information. “Knowing who might be quoted and under what circumstances, will definitely enhance the professionalism in news writing...” he said.

Both editors agreed that their newspapers’ main agenda is development for both society and nation. Hence, news selected for publication will be those that are news worthy, particularly those having strong impact on society. According to the editor from the Utusan group, “it is not

everyday that we will highlight environmental issues, but when we do highlight it is normally an issue that will have a strong impact on society.”

With regards to news agenda versus profit, the editor from NST said that news organizations need to strike a balance between professional demands and the bottom-line. He said “ Newspaper is a business enterprise and it is not a non-profit NGO...we have to make money. If we don’t make money, we are not able to produce a newspaper, pay our staff, get our journalists to do a decent professional job. Journalists also need to understand that while they have to carry out their job professionally, they need to understand the commercial element...But we have had cases when we reject money for the sake of professionalism. For instance, if a company has a lot of investment in our newspaper...but if the company gets into trouble, we need to write about them...”

CONCLUSION

The environment is a unique subject. And the environmental reporter is a unique person. He is the environmentalist and the scientist in the media industry. He must be part biologist, part chemist, part architect, part physicist, part sociologist, part lawyer, part investigator, part psychologist, part engineer, and many more. The environmental reporter must be all of these people besides being able to write and communicate clearly and effectively.

Discussion on the environment has become the “in thing” and the topic is not likely to diminish in importance in our post-modernism era now when terms like “energy crisis”, “Haze” and “Smog”, “toxic chemicals” and “radioactive waste” are at the tips of our tongues. And for as long as the industries whether food, oil, or automobile industries are producing whatever they are producing, environmental sensitization through news reports is a necessity. Although findings in this study show that very little coverage of environmental news appears in the two selected Malaysian mainstream newspapers, the frequency and

intensity of coverage will immediately increase whenever there is an outbreak of issues. Nevertheless, to create awareness and sensitivity among the public and government on environmental issues, it is thus important that the mass media in the country are more proactive in covering environmental issues rather than reactive, as has been indicated in this study.

REFERENCES

- Brosius, Hans B and Kepplinger, Hans M. 1990 The agenda setting function of television news. Static and dynamic views. *Communication Research* . Vol 17 No `2 April , p. 183-211.
- D.V.R. Murthy. 2000. Development news coverage in the Indian Press – An analysis of four dailies. *Media Asia*. Vol 27. No 1, p 24-53.
- Gunaratne, S. 1978. Media subservience and developmental journalism. *Communications and Development Review*, Vol 2. No 2, p. 3- 7.
- Griswold, W.F. and Swenson, J.D. 1992. Development news in rural Georgia newspapers: A comparison with media in developing nations. *Journalism Quarterly*. Vol 69, No. 3. p 580-590.
- Griswold, W.F. and Swenson, J.D. 1993. Not in whose Backyard? The ethics of reporting environmental issues. *Mass Communication Review*. Vol 20. No 1 and 2. p. 62 – 75.
- Hemant Shah and Gati Gayatri. 1994. Development news in elite and non-elite newspapers in Indonesia. *Journalism Quarterly*. Vol. 71, No 2. p 411-420.
- Hester, A. 1987. Investigative reporting: Subjects and methods. In Albert L. Hester and Wai Lan J. To (eds). *Handbook for Third World journalists*. Athens: The University of Georgia.

<http://www.mint.gov.my>

Jacob George. 2005. Development at agri-park not a surprise. *Malaysiakini.com*. 22 February 2005.

Khairiah Talha. 2000. Land clearing in Cameron Highlands must be stopped before it is too late. *New Straits Times*. 11 October 2000.

Mazanah Mohamad and Ezhar Tamam. 1996. *Rakan kongsi, komunikasi dan media dalam pembangunan*. (trans: Partners, communication and media in development). Selangor: Penerbit Universiti Pertanian Malaysia.

Norzaliza Samiti. 2003. Pemilihan dan penilaian berita pembangunan di Malaysia. Kajian kes akhbar *Utusan Malaysia* dan *New Straits Times*. *MA thesis*. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Ogan, C.L. 1982. Development journalism: the status of the concept. *Gazette*, Vol. 29. No. 1-2, p. 3-13.

Shafer, R. 1998. Comparing development journalism and public journalism as Interventionist Press Models. *Asian Journal of Communication*. Vol. 8 No 1, p. 31-51.

This article is based on a paper presented at The Second International Malaysia-Thailand Conference on Southeast Asian Studies – “Dialogue across borders: Cooperation amidst crises” jointly organized by Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, UKM and Mahidol University International College, Thailand, 29 November – 1 December 2005, at UKM Bangi.

Biodata: Faridah Ibrahim is an Associate Professor in Journalism and the Chair of the School of Media and Communication Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University Kebangsaan Malaysia. Before joining the academia she was a reporter at a leading Malaysian national daily. She has been teaching and researching for 23 years in areas of journalism, media ethics, management as well as related areas such as women in the media, organisational communication

and issues on research methodologies. She writes extensively in journals and books, and has coauthored several books. She obtained her doctoral degree from Universiti Putra Malaysia in Organisational Communication, MA in Journalism from University of Missouri-Columbia, USA and BA in Mass Communication (Advertising) in UiTM.