

DEVELOPING ASIA JOURNALISM AWARDS (DAJA) CEREMONY: 7 APRIL 2004

THE DAJA PROGRAM

Peter McCawley

Dean, Asian Development Bank Institute, Tokyo

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Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the ADB Institute, I'd like to welcome you all to tonight's awards ceremony. I particularly want to welcome the stars of the evening, the award-winning journalists. I also wish to acknowledge the presence of an important group of ambassadors and diplomats, and senior officials from the Government of Japan and multilateral agencies.

Background to the program

In recent months, quite a few people have asked why an organisation such as the ADB Institute is supporting this program. It might be useful, therefore, if I outline the background to the DAJA (Developing Asia Journalism Awards) scheme.

Our work in the ADB Institute is designed to tie in closely with the work of our headquarters organisation, the Asian Development Bank in Manila. The Asian Development Bank itself is strongly committed to supporting programs that aim to strengthen the processes of good governance across the Asia-Pacific region. In the ADB Institute, we are naturally keen to do what we can to support ADB's broader program in the good governance area.

Support for good governance

How, one might ask, does the sponsorship of an awards program for journalists support good governance across the Asia-Pacific region?

The answer is that it seems to us that the overall processes of good governance in any country go well beyond the role of government alone. Certainly it is of central importance that governments themselves are effective and honest and transparent. But it is also of central importance that non-government actors -- that is, the citizens of any country and the numerous civil society institutions they belong to -- are well-informed about the operations of their government and that there are effective channels through which their views on national issues can be aired. It is here that the media has several key roles to perform.

One way in which the media can contribute to good governance is by playing a watch-dog role -- by monitoring the performance of top political and official leaders and by encouraging public debate about the leadership that they provide.

A second way is by encouraging informed, high-quality debate about national policies and helping create constituencies for reform. It is unrealistic to expect government leaders to be able to promote reform acting alone. Political leaders need widespread community support to promote change across a nation. Thus the media's role in supporting reform is a very important one. It can play a key role, first, in helping create constituencies for change and then later, once reform packages have been introduced, in helping encourage acceptance of the changes across the nation.

Voice of developing countries

There are two other aspects of the DAJA program that are important as well. The first is that the program is, we hope, a modest step in the direction of strengthening the voice of the Asia-Pacific region on the international stage. In doing this, we are aiming to

respond both to the wishes of the peoples in the Asia-Pacific region themselves as well as to the priorities of the international donor community.

The Government of Japan, for example, has stressed the importance of ensuring that the views of developing countries are heard by the global community. Last year, at the Autumn meeting of the IMF-World Bank Development Committee in Dubai, Japan's Vice-Minister of Finance for International Affairs, Mr Zembe Mizoguchi, emphasised that "It is essential for the Bank and the Fund to enhance the voice of developing countries."

The other aspect of the program that is important is that hopefully the awards will be seen as a public recognition of the personal efforts made by journalists from countries in the Asia-Pacific region who provide high-quality, balanced coverage of the real issues affecting growth and development in the region.

Conclusion

In short, therefore, there are a number of important reasons why the ADB Institute should support the DAJA program. And we are very glad to have been able cooperate with so many journalists and others from the media to support this first Awards ceremony.

We greatly appreciate the support from The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan. We greatly appreciate the support from the three distinguished judges. And we bid a warm welcome to all of the finalists here tonight.