

**Chief Judge's Comments  
at Developing Asian Journalism Awards Ceremony  
14 November 2008  
Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan**

Good evening everyone.

This is the fourth year that I've had the privilege of acting as chief judge of the Developing Asia Journalism Awards or DAJA—and I must say that the job does not get any easier.

This is not so much because the competition continues to attract such a high “quantity”—but because the quality of entries is also very high, in many or most cases.

There were 249 entrants this year, submitting examples of their work in one or more of the four categories of governance, environment, infrastructure, and regional cooperation.

The fact that the overall standard of entries were so high makes the job of arriving at decisions of final winners difficult for myself and for my colleagues—Suvendri Kakuchi, Yoshio Murukami and Monzur Huq.

We do our utmost to reach fair and balanced collective decisions as to who deserves the awards. In order to do that, we must of course read all of the submitted articles very closely and carefully—and that believe me—with 241 articles submitted this year is no easy task.

It is in a fact a very onerous and time-consuming one and I'm sure that my colleagues, like myself, had to burn a good deal of midnight oil in order to get the job done along with our normal duties.

But reading the works of our DAJA entrants—who were drawn this year from no fewer than 13 countries across the Asia region—is I assure you a very worthwhile task.

In fact, it's one that I could wish all of you in this room this evening—and many people beyond might have to perform.

Why do I say this?

I say it because reading the writings of journalists from all over the Asia region as we have to do in the process of our judging opens a door to a completely different world from the one that most of us inhabit.

In our world, we worry about the gathering economic gloom as advanced countries confront their worst economic and financial crisis in half a century or more, we watch with dismay as stock markets crash, as financial markets reel, economic activity slumps ominously, and unemployment begins to rise at a rapid rate.

Where, we wonder is all the easy prosperity that we have been used to suddenly disappearing to? How soon will it return? Are our lives going to become bleaker and harder in the future?

And yet, to read the writings of our DAJA finalists is to realize that for countless thousands or in deed millions of people in Asia's poorer countries the easy life and prosperity that we have been enjoying never existed in the first place.

In so many rural and also urban areas of these countries, everyday life has continued to be a fight for the most meager amount of food and basic shelter—a fight to draw basic sustenance from the land ( if you were lucky enough to own some) or to live by selling your labor—a struggle even to get enough water to stay alive.

Life has continued to be a fight against grinding and degrading poverty against disease, and against the encroaching ravages of global warming and environmental degradation

As our DAJA journalists make clear in some of their entries, the impact of climate change is hitting the poor especially Hard, robbing many of their land, their livelihoods—and in some cases—their lives.

I could wish that the leaders of the G20 group of nations who are meeting in Washington today and tomorrow—especially those of them who come from the world's richer countries—could read the writings of our DAJA journalists.

Then, they might realize that the real crisis that they need to deal with is not on Wall Street or in the subprime mortgage market.

They need to rethink fundamentally the economic and development model that has allowed a relative few to enjoy unparalleled prosperity—up to now at least—while the bulk of the world's population continued to eke out a meager and miserable existence.

No wonder this unbalanced system is in crisis now. We need to realize the sustainable prosperity can come only when it is based on broad-based global demand and not induced by financial excess and credit-financed consumption in rich countries.

Our DAJA entrants—whether they come from Bangladesh or Bhutan, from Myanmar or Nepal or from any of the myriad countries from where we have drawn entries—know all about just how hard life can be for the have-nots and the dispossessed of this world.

They have reflected it in their writings in a way that no official report—no matter how shocking its statistics—can hope to do.

There is another thing that distinguishes the working life of many of the DAJA journalists from that which we enjoy in economically advanced nations.

This is the constant threat of political harassment, arrest or even assassination that journalists in the developing world face, because of their efforts to expose corruption and abuse of power.

This was brought home to us vividly yesterday when one of my fellow judges—Suvendrini Kakuchi—led a discussion among our DAJA finalists on how journalists can contribute to good governance in their countries.

It was a very stimulating discussion and I would like to commend the sponsors of this competition, the Asian Development Bank Institute, for organizing this year a four day workshop here in Tokyo for the DAJA entrants, dealing with critical aspects of development.

We heard about how many journalists are arrested and held for long periods in detention—or often murdered—for trying to report on countries such as Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and many more places.

It was a stark reminder of how different "the world out there" can be from our world—and I think we as journalists need to do a great deal more to show solidarity with our colleagues around this region and beyond who are fighting, and sometimes dying, to "tell it like it is."

Let me offer a second, and most sincere, thank you to ADBI on behalf of myself and my fellow judges - and I'm sure that I can speak on behalf of all our DAJA entrants too, -for organizing this competition once again.

It has been a great success. It attracted, as I said just under 250 entrants from all around Asia. Of these, 77 were female journalists.

This year, we do not have a special category for "female journalist of the year." In retrospect, that category seems to have been unnecessary—even a little condescending—because it implied that female journalists needed to be given a handicap to enable them to compete with the male entrants. You will see for yourselves in a few minutes—when we come to present the prizes—just how capable the women are of holding their own with the men!

Well, let me not go on any longer and let us get to the most important part of the evening, which is identifying the ten winners for this year—and giving them their well-deserved awards.

For those of you who do not receive an award, do not be put off trying again. As I said at the outset, the overall standard of entries this year was high and there were many "near misses" so far as potential prize winners were concerned.

Let me close by thanking Dean Kawai for his support for the DAJA and once again his predecessor, Peter McCawley for launching the contest four years ago. I'd also like to thank Worapot Manupitpatpong of ADBI and the rest of the ADBI staff here in Tokyo for all the support that they given to us judges and to the DAJA in general. And I would also like to thank Catherine Makino, President of the FCCJ, for graciously agreeing to MC this evening's event.

I'd like to thank too, my fellow judges—and you will be meeting them individually during the awards presentations.