



Press, Power & Politics

ASIA

November 16-17, 2000 • Hong Kong



Board of Trustees

Charles L. Overby, Chairman
and Chief Executive Officer

Peter S. Prichard, President

Harry W. Brooks Jr.
Madelyn P. Jennings
Malcolm R. Kirschenbaum
Bette Bao Lord
Brian Mulroney
Jan Neuharth
Will Norton Jr.
John C. Quinn
Josefina A. Salas-Porras
John Seigenthaler
Paul Simon

Allen H. Neuharth, Founder

Editorial:

Maurice R. Fliess
Rod Sandeen

Photos:

Judy G. Rolfe

Map:

Grant Jerding

The Freedom Forum World Center

1101 Wilson Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22209
USA

Tel: 703/528-0800

Fax: 703/284-3529

E-mail: news@freedomforum.org

Internet: www.freedomforum.org

The Freedom Forum Asian Center

Offices 1502-03, 15th Floor
Shui On Centre, 6-8 Harbour Road
Wanchai, Hong Kong

Phone: 852-2596-0018

Fax: 852-2598-8818

E-mail: tffasia@freedomforum.org.hk

Order publications by phone:

The Freedom Forum makes available single copies of a wide range of conference reports, studies, speeches and other publications related to the media, journalism education and the First Amendment. To request a publications list call 800/830-3733.

Online:

The Freedom Forum's online news service, *free!*, is on the Internet at www.freedomforum.org. This service is a timely source of information about free press, free speech, free spirit and journalism issues worldwide.

PRESS, POWER & POLITICS • ASIA MEDIA FORUM

Contents

Page

Political reporting tests freedom in Asia	1
Independent media bolster Hong Kong, official says	2
Journalists compare coverage of Hong Kong, Taiwan elections	3
Aggressive political coverage can lead to disdain, death threats, censorship	4
Indonesian editor supports press council to resolve media disputes	5
Online news sites: helping to plug in voters	6
Panelists draw sharp distinction between Asian and Western political cartooning	7
Free-flowing discussions accentuate Hong Kong forum	8

Asian journalists gather in Hong Kong to assess their leeway to cover politics



Chris Wells, senior vice president/ international of The Freedom Forum

South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Thailand – described varying degrees of success and frustration in trying to report political news.

The program got off to a positive start when Anson Chan, the second-ranking person in the government of Hong Kong, said freedom of the press is essential to the continued well-being of Hong Kong, which since the end of British control in 1997 has been a “special administrative region” of China. But her remarks were offset by a sobering

assessment from Willy Wo-Lap Lam, a Hong Kong journalist known for his hard-hitting reporting on the Chinese government. Lam said that the man who presides over Hong Kong, Tung Chee-hwa, has restrictive views regarding the press that echo those of the leadership in Beijing.

From the vantage point of Hong Kong, The Freedom Forum on Nov. 16-17 examined how the news media are covering elections and other political developments across Asia.

Speakers from Hong Kong and nine Asian nations – India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Philippines,

assessment from Willy Wo-Lap Lam, a Hong Kong journalist known for his hard-hitting reporting on the Chinese government. Lam said that the man who presides over Hong Kong, Tung Chee-hwa, has restrictive views regarding the press that echo those of the leadership in Beijing.

And so it went: a beacon of hope here, a shroud of censorship (or self-censorship) there. Where democracies are taking root, the news media are working mightily to nourish them. Where strong-arm leaders still rule, courageous journalists are challenging the established order.

The discussions focused not only on how newspapers and broadcasters have covered recent elections across Asia, but also on how Internet Web sites are beginning to play a role, and on how Asian editorial cartoonists are persevering in often-hostile environments.

The two-day program in Hong Kong, home of The Freedom Forum Asian Center, concluded the yearlong series of forums on “Press, Power & Politics.” Previous 2000 forums were held in Lima, Peru; London; and Accra, Ghana.

Political reporting tests freedom in Asia

For journalists in Asia, covering elections, in particular, and politics, in general, can be like negotiating a minefield. In a politically, socially and economically diverse region that stretches from Kabul to Jakarta, even those working for relatively free news media, such as in Hong Kong or Thailand, face daunting challenges.



Arnold Zeitlin, director of The Freedom Forum Asian Center

In November, well-known China critic Willy Wo-Lap Lam resigned from the English-language *South China Morning Post* of Hong Kong after being abruptly replaced as China editor — a job he had held for more than 10 years. Lam often wrote critically of the government in Beijing. In



Susan Bennett, director/Asia and European programs of The Freedom Forum

a book published last year, he offered an unflattering observation of Chinese President Jiang Zemin. “Jiang watchers have spotted similarities between his Machiavellian approach to grabbing and wielding power and that of Mao (Tse-Tung),” he wrote.

Lam’s ouster, which drew protests from his co-workers, came just three weeks after Hong Kong reporters in Beijing were berated by Jiang for the mere asking of a provocative question. Jiang, who rarely faces unprogrammed queries from Chinese journalists, was tossed a political hot potato by one of the bolder Hong Kong reporters who wanted to know more about the support of China’s vice premier for Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa. Did this amount to an “imperial order” for Tung to receive another term when his first one expires in 2002, the reporter asked.

While cameras rolled and clicked, Jiang, in a rare public show of emotion, gesticulated and shouted in Mandarin, Cantonese and English at Hong Kong reporters gathered

around him for what was supposed to be only a photo opportunity. “You pressmen need to know more,” sputtered Jiang, according to an English transcript published in the *South China Morning Post*. “But the questions you keep asking — too simple, sometimes naïve. Understand or not? Got it? ... If your reports are not accurate enough, you will have to be held responsible. I did not say giving an impeccable order. No such meaning at all.”

Observers will have to wait and see if the warning will chill Hong Kong journalists’ coverage of news sensitive to China. Chinese media neither printed nor uttered a word about their president’s outburst. But news accounts were available to the growing numbers (estimated at about 16 million) in China who have access to the Internet. They get news from the Internet despite the Chinese government’s frantic — and so far unsuccessful — attempts to control it.

All across Asia, journalists face various forms and varying levels of censorship and harassment as they attempt to report on tumultuous political times and complicated election scenarios.

Thailand will hold the first Asian election of the new millennium on Jan. 6, 2001. Like Malaysia and several other mainland Asian states, Thailand is a constitutional monarchy with a parliament and a prime minister as head of state. The country’s press, while beset with self-policing problems, functions without government interference.

For Thailand’s southern neighbor, Malaysia, control of the news media has been firmly clasped in government hands during the 18-year rule of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. The control grew tighter following the 1998 arrest of Anwar Ibrahim, a deputy prime minister who was once Mahathir’s heir apparent. Ibrahim underwent lengthy trials on subversion and sodomy charges and was convicted and jailed on both counts. He

denied any guilt and said he was a victim of trying to effect democratic reform.

Since then, Malaysian readers’ confidence in the one-sided reporting of the government-controlled press has plummeted and mainstream circulation has declined. Meantime, the circulation of *Harakah*, a twice-weekly organ of the Pan Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), a fundamentalist opposition party, more than quadrupled to 500,000. Independent and opposition Internet Web sites became principal sources of news, and an independent Internet news site called Malaysiakini appeared at election time to award-winning acclaim.

In March, the government cracked down on *Harakah* by enforcing a regulation restricting its distribution to party members only and limiting publication to twice a month. The government also closed a monthly magazine and a weekly newspaper.

In the general election following Ibrahim’s arrest, Mahathir’s United Malays National Organization party, the dominant player in a government coalition, retained control but with a smaller majority.

News media in some other corners of Asia have fared better:

■ Five Asian states — the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Taiwan — provide for direct election of a president. An untrammelled press, despite some pressure from government and other special interests, flourishes in all but Singapore and Sri Lanka. In South Korea, however, the press earlier this year agreed to tight restrictions on coverage of the summit between President Kim Dae Jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong Il.

■ Parliamentary elections thrive in India, Indonesia, Mongolia and some other Asian countries. The news media function freely in India and Indonesia but battle for independence in Mongolia.

“All across Asia, journalists face various forms and varying levels of censorship and harassment as they attempt to report on tumultuous political times and complicated election scenarios.”

Independent media bolster Hong Kong, Anson Chan's remarks hailed as 'Magna Carta for

The second-ranking official in the government of Hong Kong gave a ringing endorsement of press freedom as the Asia Media Forum on "Press, Power & Politics: Asia" got under way.

Anson Chan, chief secretary for administration, said in a keynote address that the Hong Kong news media have "not lost any of [their] fabled sting" in the three and a half years since the former British colony was handed over to China. They continue "to rigorously and relentlessly exercise [their] role as a watchdog on the government," she said.

"Hong Kong regards press freedom as a bedrock guarantee of our way of life. It is enshrined in our constitution. More importantly, it is imbedded in the hearts and minds of our people," Chan said. "We want to see press freedom deepened, not diminished. We believe stronger and even more professional media, free of self-censorship or political correctness, would be beneficial to our society."

Later in the program, Willy Wo-Lap Lam, who on Nov. 6 resigned from the *South China Morning Post* after being relieved of his responsibilities as associate editor for China news, hailed Chan's remarks as "a Magna Carta for press freedom" in Hong Kong. But he cautioned that the chief executive of Hong Kong's government, Tung Chee-hwa, has views on press freedom that are "closer to the standard north of the border" in mainland China. In addition, Lam said he has detected a decline in aggressive coverage by Hong Kong news media over the last several years.

In her remarks, Chan said people in Hong Kong (population 6.8 million) enjoy not only freedom of the press but also "the freedoms of speech, assembly, worship and the myriad other freedoms which are inherent in and fundamental to an open, tolerant, law-abiding, pluralistic society."

"You can't have a virtually free press or a more-or-less free press."



Freedom Forum President Peter S. Prichard welcomes Anson Chan to the Asia Media Forum.



Willy Wo-Lap Lam decries a "day-to-day downward spiral" of media willingness to tackle vital issues.

Hong Kong "is the same noisy, argumentative place that it has ever been, and maybe more so," she said.

Chan, who worked for the British government in Hong Kong for 35 years prior to the transition to Chinese sovereignty, said those freedoms are protected by "our English common-law system," an independent judiciary and Hong Kong's constitution. In the constitution, known as the "Basic Law," China granted Hong Kong some autonomy under the concept of "one country, two systems."

"How freely the press operates in Hong Kong is seen as a litmus test for 'one country, two systems,'" she said. "Any perceived slippage is counted as a step down a slippery slope."

Hong Kong's bustling economy is directly tied to "a free and unfettered flow of news and information," she added. "Any signs of political correctness or self-censorship clogging up that flow" would send "all the wrong signals" to business partners and to the world at large.

In fact, the press is tougher on Hong Kong's current government than it was on the previous British authorities, she said. Before opening the local newspapers each morning, Chan said she reminds herself of something Nelson Rockefeller said during his time in public service: "Reading about one's failings in the daily newspapers is one of the privileges of high office in a free country."

Nor have Hong Kong's news media shied away from covering issues of great sensitivity to the Beijing government, she said, mentioning Taiwan, Tibet, Chinese dissidents and the Falun Gong spiritual movement.

Chan said a free press must be accepted "warts and all. You can't have a virtually free press or a more-or-less free press. That's like being a little pregnant."

At the same time, she told the audience of about 200 people — including a sizable contingent of working press — that it is in the news media's best interests to aspire to "the highest possible standards. The higher the standards, the greater [the] standing and impact and influence in the community will be. And that is good for the media and good for the community."

Hong Kong's lively media scene includes 26 Chinese-language daily newspapers and more than a half-dozen English-language dailies as well as television and radio outlets. Chan said the competition, especially among the Chinese-language press, has led to complaints of "a general dumbing-down in a scramble for juicier stories, sharper angles and more sensational headlines."

Given the tremendous freedom it enjoys, the press "should take it upon itself to better inform and illuminate the public" by seeking the truth and striving for fairness, she said.

Both Chan and the program's second speaker, Lam, expressed concern that some of

official says press freedom'

the best minds in Hong Kong journalism are leaving the profession. Chan urged news executives to confront the problem by offering more career opportunities and training as well as better compensation. She commended The Freedom Forum for conducting numerous seminars and conferences for journalists at its Asian Center in Hong Kong.

Lam, whose view of press freedom in Hong Kong was less sanguine, said "a climate of fear, a climate of intimidation" initiated by Chinese leaders in Beijing has contributed to the high rate of turnover that both he and Chan deplored. "This (turnover) has had a telling and a very detrimental effect on the quality of Hong Kong journalism," Lam said.

The Basic Law provides that the government cannot dictate to Hong Kong's media, he said, but "psychological warfare" is another story. Chinese President Jiang Zemin and his colleagues "have been quite successful with this intimidation campaign — killing the chickens to scare the monkeys, this kind of thing."

In his own case, Lam tied his departure from the *Morning Post* to his no-holds-barred coverage of China and its government. Lam was stripped of his China editorship four months after the newspaper's leading shareholder complained about his coverage of a meeting between Jiang and Hong Kong industrialists on the issue of Tung's possible reelection in 2002 for another term.

Last year Lam completed a book that candidly assessed the Chinese president. Lam worked on the book during a Freedom Forum fellowship in New York City.

His comments to the Asia Media Forum came during a conversation with veteran U.S. journalist Bernard Kalb.

Lam said Hong Kong's newsrooms lack full independence from "powerful owners and management who may have a different agenda because of their diverse and huge investments in the mainland."

At the moment, he said, there is no need to be an alarmist about Hong Kong's news media, which are "still lively and vibrant."

"However, I do see problems" — a "day-to-day downward spiral" of not touching on vital issues. If that trend continues, press freedom "might be impaired," he said.



Freedom Forum trustee Bette Bao Lord (right) leads the discussion featuring Christine Loh of Hong Kong and Rex Wang of Taiwan.

Journalists compare coverage of Hong Kong, Taiwan elections

A former Hong Kong legislator said she saw a direct link between a declining interest in Hong Kong politics and superficial coverage by the local news media.

Christine Loh, now a newspaper columnist, lamented a trend toward short stories emphasizing gore and sex. "I'm not sure that's doing Hong Kong people a favor," she said.

Loh and Rex Wang, chief editorial writer for the *Taiwan News*, compared notes about how the media in Hong Kong and Taiwan, with China looking over their shoulders, covered recent elections on the two islands. Author Bette Bao Lord, a Freedom Forum trustee, moderated the discussion.

In Taiwan, voter turnout for the March presidential election was 83%, up from 74% in 1996, Wang said. In Hong Kong, voter turnout for the September legislative elections was 43%, down from 54% in the first post-colonial election in 1998, Loh said.

In Taiwan, the media are biased and play the China factor prominently, Wang said. Meanwhile, in Hong Kong, Loh said, the media are bored with elections and don't cover the China factor aggressively.

Part of the problem is that the legislature in Hong Kong "is relatively meaningless because it doesn't have power," Loh said. Most of the political clout in Hong Kong lies with the chief executive, Tung Chee-hwa, who was selected by a pro-Beijing committee.

The media and an electorate of 3.5 mil-

lion in Hong Kong also deal with elections in which candidates campaign for only 24 of the 60 legislative seats. The other 36 legislators are elected by the "business and professional elite," composed of an additional electorate of about 200,000 people, most with a pro-Beijing leaning.

Further complicating life for the media is that the campaigns are not about issues because the legislature has such little power, Loh said. Still, she said, the people have an interest in public affairs. The media could feed that interest by providing in-depth coverage and analysis of politics.

In Taiwan, the Kuomintang (KMT) party that ruled the country for 51 years was ousted in the presidential election in March. Chen Shui-bian, representing the Democratic Progressive Party and independence for Taiwan, was elected. More than 90% of the media supported the KMT and a policy of one China, Wang said, and most of the media now favor a recall of the new president for ending construction of a nuclear power plant.

Martial law was lifted in Taiwan in 1987 when there were 31 newspapers on the island, opening the way for a free press. Now there are 367 newspapers, 121 radio stations and 27 cable television systems, Wang said.

Wang criticized the media for making up stories to fan controversies. "We call the media in Taiwan not fact-finders but story manufacturers," he said.

Aggressive political coverage can lead

The power of television came late to Thailand, but it came with impact.

Independent television was created about five years ago with a government mandate that its content be at least 70% news and documentaries, according to Suthichai Sae-Yoon, group editor in chief for Nation Multimedia Group and founder of Thailand's first 24-hour news channel.

A former newspaper editor, he joined Thailand's first independent station, ITV, in 1996 to provide that content. Among the first stories was election fraud, with footage of ballot boxes being stuffed. "People said, 'That's the kind of TV we want,'" he said.

Sae-Yoon also took his cameras to outlying regions where politicians were stumping for votes. Villagers were interviewed about the issues important to them, and college professors helped the people phrase their questions.



Diana Lin, shown on the set of TVB News in Hong Kong, says campaign coverage should focus on personalities, not issues.



Premesh Chandran describes the role of his Malaysiakini Web site, as Young Joon Hahm of South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo* newspaper listens.



From left: Suthichai Sae-Yoon says voting fraud made compelling TV in Thailand. Nomin Lkhagvasuren tells The Freedom Forum's Arnold Zeitlin (right) that Mongolia's press is learning democratic values.

When the politicians showed up to answer questions, the scene was broadcast live.

In the beginning, politicians liked the coverage because it gave them public exposure, Sae-Yoon said, but later they grew to dislike it because it put them on the spot.

In **Malaysia**, the Web site Malaysiakini ("kini" means "now" in Malay) has taken advantage of a new law to provide independent news coverage in a country where the media are controlled by the state. In his enthusiasm to create a high-tech industry in Malaysia, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad endorsed a multimedia law that gives Internet sites such as Malaysiakini.com much more freedom than print media to report the news.

Premesh Chandran, co-founder of the online news site, said the year-old Malaysiakini also serves as a mirror of the Malaysian media and pressures them to improve.

Iqbal Athas covers the Tamil separatist movement as defense correspondent for *The Sunday Times* in **Sri Lanka**. For the last two years — since he wrote about military procurement — he has had two police guards stationed outside his home. Athas and his family had received death threats in the past when he reported on setbacks inflicted by the Tamil Tigers on the Sri Lankan military.

During recent elections in Sri Lanka, the news media were barred from writing about the Tamil war. It was the first time in 51 years of Sri Lankan independence, Athas said, that the media had been censored.

Nomin Lkhagvasuren, formerly an editor with the *Gobi Business News* in **Mongolia** and now a free-lance journalist, said the Mongolian press has not yet learned to cover

elections professionally. The country has been democratic for only 10 years, and the citizens and the press are still learning how to live and operate in a democratic society.

Public-opinion polls taken in 1998 among Mongolian voters indicated that ex-Communists would win the 2000 parliamentary elections. During those two years, she said, media coverage did little to change the minds of the electorate.

A 1998 law says the state can't own any media in Mongolia. But radio and television still are controlled by the state because they rely on government subsidies, Lkhagvasuren said.

Radio and television are the only media that reach the countryside, where more than two-thirds of Mongolians live.

The Mongolian Ministry of Justice, which registers all media, accused the independent press of acting unethically during the 2000 election campaign, Lkhagvasuren said. The ministry accused newspapers of soliciting bribes from political parties, of which there are about two dozen, in exchange for not writing critical articles. The newspapers denied the charge.

The media in **South Korea** recently came under criticism for agreeing not to write articles offensive to North Korea during the historic summit meeting between the two enemies earlier this year. South Korea has been free of military rule for 10 years, and the media are free. But Young Joon Hahm, Asian correspondent for the South Korean daily *Chosun Ilbo*, said the agreement endangered the free press in South Korea.

Diana Lin, executive producer for TVB News in **Hong Kong**, said she sees the role of

to disdain, death threats, censorship

television during an election campaign as showing viewers the personality of the candidates, adding that there isn't enough time to get into issues. Generally, she said, the issues are the same in each campaign. The candidates either are pro-government, pro-democracy or pro-Beijing.

Dorab Sopariwala, election analyst for the Star News channel in **India**, said the Election Commission in that country barred television

stations from broadcasting results of exit polls during elections. The media ignored the ruling, and eventually the courts agreed with them. But elections are complicated in India, which has a population of more than 1 billion, an illiteracy rate of about 50%, a huge land-mass and a history of voter fraud. For instance, national elections cannot be held on the same day because troops must be moved from region to region to ensure fair elections.

In addition to those complications, Sopariwala said he has become reluctant to make projections based on exit polls because elections have gotten so close. If a forecast is off, it can lead to erroneous reports that the wrong government — not just the wrong candidate — has won the election.

"No one in his right mind should be exit polling in India in this day," Sopariwala said.

Indonesian editor supports press council to resolve media disputes

Between unfriendly courts and unruly mobs lies an unlikely remedy — a press council.

Bambang Harymurti, editor in chief of *Tempo*, a weekly news-magazine in Indonesia, said he supports the country's new, voluntary press council as a means to resolve media disputes because the courts there don't function well and mobs sometimes settle grievances.

The council accepts complaints only when both sides agree to stay out of court. Without an alternative way to settle disagreements between the media and sources, the "person with the most money would win — either by buying the court or renting a mob," Harymurti said.

Press councils often instill fear in journalists because in some countries they are controlled by the government and used to license the news media.

Harymurti and Daniel Dhakidae, director of research and development for *Kompas*, Indonesia's largest daily newspaper, described media that are free of government interference but that fear mobs.

In the first four months of 2000, the Alliance of Independent Journalists in Indonesia documented 21 cases of journalists being harassed, threatened or harmed. Crowds angered by media coverage have protested at newspaper offices and radio stations. Journalists have been threatened with harm if they report news that angers local interests.

Most of the mob action is triggered by stories about religion, Harymurti said.

Moderator Bernard Kalb asked whether either newsman had faith in Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid.



Daniel Dhakidae of *Kompas* (left) and Bambang Harymurti of *Tempo* (right) enjoy a light moment with moderator Bernard Kalb.

Dhakidae criticized Wahid for being "wishy-washy and unpredictable." But he praised him for abolishing the Ministry of Information, a government agency used to control the media under former President Suharto, a military strongman who was driven from office in 1998.

Tempo was banned in 1994 under Suharto and reopened in 1999. Harymurti was the magazine's U.S. bureau chief when the publication was closed.

Harymurti likened Suharto's form of repression to Swiss cheese. "As long as you moved from one hole to another, you were OK," he said.

Harymurti answered the Wahid question by describing three mysteries in Indonesia:

- When a person will die.
- When the world will end.
- What Wahid will do next.

Harymurti said Indonesians are accustomed to a government that promises prosperity in return for the surrender of individual rights. A lot of people among the population of 210 million are indoctrinated with the idea of a strong government that keeps people from killing each other, he said.

"Some people who fought Suharto — they wanted a new strong person," he said, adding that the most important role for the media is to fight this paradigm.

Online news sites: helping to plug in voters

Traditional news media are using their Internet sites to get more people politically inclined, three online journalists said.

"The interactivity of the Web gives us a very direct way to engage our readers and get them plugged into the electoral and political process," said Mark Stencel, managing editor of Washingtonpost.com's OnPolitics Web site.

Prospective voters in the recent U.S. presidential election were able to ask questions of *Washington Post* political writers, read up-to-the-minute reports (including transcripts and quick analyses of the debates) and explore candidates' positions on specific issues, Stencel said. The effort left him hopeful that public cynicism about politics and apathy about voting, for which the news media "bear some responsibility," can be turned around.

Daisy Li Yuet-Wah, director of Apple Daily online in Hong Kong, said the Internet provides "a new arena for readers who have a real concern about politics." People can have online chats with one another to discuss political issues, said Li, whose Web site is an offshoot of the Chinese-language *Apple Daily* newspaper.

The Internet also can be a vehicle to keep the public engrossed in politics when someone elected to office gets into hot water.

In the Philippines, BusinessWorld Online has been publishing transcripts of the impeachment proceedings against President Joseph Estrada to allow people to make up their own minds about the case, said Michael D. Marasigan, chief operating officer and editor, and former city editor of the daily *BusinessWorld* in Manila.

Stencel offered to provide some pointers on how a Web site can cover an impeachment trial, because "we have some experience with that."

"For a long time, television took the breaking-news business away from newspapers, and our role became much more about analysis and context," Stencel said. "The Internet has put us back in the breaking-news business," requiring "much more rapid-fire editorial decision-making."

The mantra of Washingtonpost.com is, "We'd rather be right than first," and it "saved

us during the (Clinton) impeachment process," Stencel said. But the Web site was among many news outlets that on the night of the 2000 presidential election prematurely proclaimed George W. Bush the victor.

Panel moderator Adam Clayton Powell III, director of technology and programs for The Freedom Forum, said the biggest online-related change between the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections was the number of U.S. households linked to the Internet. It now exceeds 50%, he said.

In Hong Kong, last September's legislative elections were the first to be covered online, Li said. The Apple Daily site conducted preference polls that produced one notable result: People who participated tended to be more liberal than the overall electorate.

But the impact of the Internet on the elections was "not significant at all," she said, because only about 29% of Hong Kong residents between ages 15 and 64 are online.

Li noted, though, that one of the beauties of the Internet is that it has no boundaries. It enables people who move away from an area to follow politics closely in their previous place of residence. Between 50% and 60% of the users of Apple Daily online live somewhere other than Hong Kong, especially North America, Australia and New Zealand, she said.

Through e-mail correspondence and participation in online forums, "We are certain there are some readers from China" as well, Li added.

Less than a million of the 75 million people living in the Philippines are online, and most visitors to BusinessWorld Online are Filipinos residing elsewhere, Marasigan said.

The site, which he helped to start in 1995, is gearing up to cover local elections in 2001. As part of that effort he sent a "mobile media"



Daisy Li Yuet-Wah says Apple Daily online connects people who follow Hong Kong politics. At left is Michael D. Marasigan of BusinessWorld Online in the Philippines.



Mark Stencel recounts how Washingtonpost.com erred on the night of the 2000 U.S. presidential election.

team to 14 provinces to see the extent to which an infrastructure for the Internet exists. They filed stories and transmitted digital photos from pay telephones in convenience stores, from business telephones in restaurants and from the occasional cybercafe. Their conclusion: The Philippines is very much a Third World nation in terms of information technology, even though many technical people from the country are now working in California's Silicon Valley.

All three panelists said they were optimistic about the future of Internet journalism — even Li, who saw the work force of Apple Daily online slashed recently by owner Jimmy Lai Chee-ying because of high operating losses. Li, whose position was not eliminated, said she continued to "feel very positive about the Internet." It is "not just something fashionable. It's actually a revolution. We will not go back."

"Television took the breaking-news business away from newspapers. ... The Internet has put us back."

—Mark Stencel, managing editor, Washingtonpost.com's OnPolitics Web site

Panelists draw sharp distinction between Asian and Western political cartooning

Editorial cartoonists in Asia are going after corrupt politicians and are risking their jobs, even their lives. Their counterparts in the United States and some other Western countries are living comfortably and going after laughs.

That was the sharp distinction drawn at the final discussion of the Asia Media Forum.

The criticism of Western political cartooning came from moderator Nury Vittachi, a former editorial cartoonist who now is a humor columnist for the daily *Hong Kong iMail* and the weekly *Far Eastern Economic Review*; and panelist Larry Feign, an American cartoonist who draws for the *iMail*.

In his introductory remarks, Vittachi said of the Western cartoon scene, "It's comfortable, it's cozy." He contrasted that with the situation that he said cartoonists have faced in his homeland of Sri Lanka since the 1950s — physical threats, government crackdowns and other forms of intimidation.

"The difference is, Western cartoonists have it really easy. These guys, they fight for their lives, they fight for their jobs," he said, gesturing toward panelists Feign, S.C. Opatha and Sara Seneviratne.

Opatha, chief cartoonist of *The Sunday Leader* in Colombo, "has known more press controls and clampdowns than probably any cartoonist in history," Vittachi said. He called Opatha "a brave man."

Feign said that when he was growing up in the United States, editorial cartoons had political punch. "They don't any more," he said. "They're just gags."

Neither Vittachi nor Feign offered specific examples of cartoonists or cartoons that fit into a purely comedic category. They did, however, praise the work of *The Guardian's* Steve Bell in London and that of the late American cartoonist Jeff MacNelly as hard-hitting editorial commentary.

Feign was let go by the *South China Morning Post* in 1995 after he penned a controversial cartoon about organ transplants. His next full-time job at a newspaper came this past May, when the *iMail* revived his politically and socially oriented cartoon strip, "The World of Lily Wong."

"I personally was blacklisted (and) couldn't find any work for a few years," Feign said. "It wasn't fun."

But he also said that nothing in his career could compare with experiences of Opatha and Seneviratne, both of whom have firsthand experiences about the dangers of cartooning in Sri Lanka.

Opatha, a cartoonist in Sri Lanka for three decades, said he has been able to persevere because of strong editorial leadership at the *Leader* and his own determination to seek the truth, to make a difference.

"I always take the side of the poor man ... because I have been in a poor family," he said, adding that the poor "have been taken for a ride by the politicians."

Opatha acknowledged that when he goes after corruption and bribery, he risks physical reprisal. There are hardly any young cartoonists working in Sri Lanka "because they are very frightened," he said.

Seneviratne said he began editorial cartooning in Sri Lanka when he was 16. He worked at the Independent group of newspapers, but his time there ended suddenly two years later when soldiers met him at the door and prevented his entering the office.

He later produced six cartoon-laden booklets that ultimately helped to bring down the ruling government. But by that time, he said, he had been forced — at age 21 — to leave the country.

By way of Italy, Singapore and Australia he made his way to the *Hong Kong Standard*, where one of his cartoons about the situation back in Sri Lanka got him in trouble with an editor and into a confrontation with a colleague. When in 1997 management told him to stop drawing newly installed Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa as a "pineapple head," "I said, 'That is how I look at him, so what can I do?'" Under pressure, he resigned.

After a brief fling with a startup cartoon magazine, Seneviratne returned to his old desk at the *iMail*, successor to the now-defunct *Standard*.

"I'm not a well-built fellow. ... So what I do is use my pen," he said.

Vittachi, the moderator, said he, too, has had his troubles. The *South China Morning Post* commissioned him to draw a series of cartoons, and what he produced featured "a little monkey who gets into Tung Chee-hwa's brain and finds all sorts of bad stuff in there." He added that the newspaper "took one look at it and canceled it."



From left: Cartoonists Larry Feign of the *Hong Kong iMail*, S.C. Opatha of *The Sunday Leader* in Sri Lanka and Sara Seneviratne of the *iMail* testify to the hazards of editorial cartooning in Asia.

Free-flowing discussions accentuate Hong Kong forum



Clockwise from top: Attendees view a photo display of Freedom Forum programs around the world. Some of Hong Kong's 30-plus newspapers compete for space at a newsstand. More than 200 people, including a large contingent of working press, attend the opening program at the Grand Hyatt hotel.



At The Freedom Forum Asian Center, Pakistani editor Shaheen Sebhahi (left) asks a question while other attendees (above) listen intently.

The Freedom Forum, based in Arlington, Va., is a nonpartisan, international foundation dedicated to free press, free speech and free spirit for all people. The foundation focuses on four main priorities: the Newseum, First Amendment issues, newsroom diversity and world press freedom.

The Freedom Forum funds two independent affiliates — the Newseum, the interactive museum of news in Arlington; and the First Amendment Center, with offices at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., and in New York City and Arlington. Other operating offices are in Buenos Aires, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, London and Cocoa Beach, Fla.

The Freedom Forum was established in 1991 under the direction of Founder Allen H. Neuharth as successor to a foundation started in 1935 by newspaper publisher Frank E. Gannett. The Freedom Forum is not affiliated with Gannett Co., does not solicit or accept financial contributions, and does not accept unsolicited funding requests. Its work is supported by income from an endowment now worth about \$1 billion in diversified assets.