

## Earth Journalism Network Builds Asian Cooperation During Bangkok Meeting

Journalists representing Asian environmental networks brainstorm on how to improve the quantity and quality of environmental news coverage in their regions.

A select group of top Asian environmental journalists met in Bangkok in October 2005 and agreed to work together to advance the field in the region, beginning with plans to collaborate in the coverage of some key trans-boundary issues. As representatives of journalism networks from China, India, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand, they identified several strategies to be pursued, including capacity-building through workshops and the training of trainers, regional and local fellowships that would support coverage of key stories, and co-production work that would appear in local media and also on the web.

### ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS LEADERS STRATEGIZE

Sponsored by the Earth Journalism Network (EJN), an Internews project which seeks to enable journalists in developing countries to cover the environment more effectively, the brainstorming session brought together Pradip Saha, the editor of *Down to Earth*, a magazine published by the Center for Science and Environment (CSE) in India; Nguyen Mai Hien, the coordinator of the Vietnam Forum of Environmental Journalists; Harry Surjadi, a freelance journalist who previously worked for the Indonesian newspaper *Kompas* and now oversees a listserve of environmental journalists; Anchalee Kongrut, a reporter for the *Bangkok Post* and member of the Thai Society of Environmental Journalists; and Lihong Shi, an independent Chinese film-maker who is now producing nature documentaries for the BBC.

### NEED FOR PROVINCIAL NETWORKS CITED

In discussing how to improve the quantity and quality of environmental news cov-



EJN participants inspect Bang Krachao, a preserved wetlands that serves as the "lungs" of Bangkok

erage in Asia, a commonly cited objective was to build up networks of environmental journalists outside of the big cities where they already exist. "We would like to build up networks in the provinces," explained Lihong Shi, who belongs to a forum of environmental journalists in Beijing. "We can do it through trainings. We have identified interested journalists and can bring scientists and other experts there." These trainings, noted Mai Hien, could also produce articles for the local media.

It was agreed, however, that it would not be possible to create an international curriculum that would be suitable for everyone. Even within a country, issues simply vary too much from region to region. But creating a common framework or method-

ology is possible. "We need to have international trainers, but also local trainers," said Mai Hien. "That's why we would like to do training of trainers." Harry Surjadi added that much of the environmental information that is available is in English, which local journalists can't read. "It needs to be translated, for instance by creating a news-bank of translated articles." Pradip Saha emphasized the importance of increasing environmental understanding among all kinds of journalists, not just those who specialize in environmental issues.

### OBSTACLES IDENTIFIED

The participants identified a number of obstacles that led to a shortage of envi-

over ►



INTERNEWS

**For More Information:** James Fahn, Executive Director, Earth Journalism Network

Email: jfahn@internews.org • Mobile: +66-(0)1-960-7673 • Office: +66-(0)53-854-551 • Website: www.earthjournalism.org

**In United States Contact:** Anamika Nelson, Internews Network Senior Program Associate • Office: +1 202 833-5740 x305 • Email: anelson@internews.org



**EJN brainstorm participants (from left): Thailand's Anchalee Kongrut, Bang Krachao chief Sumeth Sirilak, Vietnam's Nguyen Mai Hien and meeting coordinator Guy Sharett (kneeling), EJN Executive Director James Fahn, India's Pradip Saha, Internews' Ivan Sigal, China's Lihong Shi, and Indonesia's Harry Surjadi.**

ronmental stories in mainstream Asian media, ranging from a lack of understanding among senior editors and producers to a lack of funds for traveling and training workshops. Access to information, particularly from the government and the corporate sector, is also a major problem, and there was support for advocating for the passage of freedom of information laws in those countries where they do not exist and better enforcement of such measures where they do.

### PILOT FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM IS FIRST STEP FOR NETWORK

The EJN collaborators agreed to form a loose network that would work together wherever possible, and their first step will be to set up a pilot fellowship program that would band together journalists from different countries to work on common issues. A list of potential topics includes

trans-boundary pollution stories, illegal wildlife and timber trade, marine and river management issues, as well as climate change and energy.



**Bangkok Post reporter Anchalee Kongrut asks locals when they stopped using the canals of Bang Krachao.**

As it turned out, the brainstorm session itself helped to produce a front-page lead story in the Bangkok Post. Anchalee Kongrut's report on Bang Krachao – a huge wetlands south of Bangkok that serves as the “lungs” of the mega-city and was the site of the EJN field trip – made headlines in Thailand by reporting the threat of creeping encroachment.



**At the Bangkok offices of Internews, journalists brainstormed strategies to promote environmental reporting in Asia.**

### ABOUT INTERNEWS

Internews® Network is an international non-profit organization that works to improve access to information for people around the world by fostering independent media and promoting open communications policies. Internews' programs are built on the conviction that providing people with access to vibrant, diverse news and information empowers them to make their voices heard and to participate effectively in their communities.

Internews projects currently span Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Formed in 1982, Internews Network, Inc. is a founding member of Internews International, whose members work in over 50 countries.

### INTERNEWS® INTERNATIONAL OFFICES

Afghanistan (Kabul)  
 Algeria (Algiers)  
 Armenia (Yerevan)  
 Azerbaijan (Baku, Ganja)  
 Bosnia-Herzegovina (Sarajevo)  
 Bulgaria (Sofia)  
 Chad (Abéché)  
 China (Beijing)  
 Côte d'Ivoire (Abidjan)  
 Egypt (Cairo)  
 Ethiopia (Addis Ababa)  
 France (Paris)  
 Georgia (Tbilisi)  
 India (New Delhi)  
 Indonesia (Jakarta, Banda Aceh)  
 Kazakhstan (Almaty)  
 Kenya (Nairobi)  
 Kosovo (Prishtina)  
 Kyrgyz Republic (Bishkek, Osh)  
 Macedonia (Skopje)  
 Nigeria (Abuja)  
 Pakistan (Islamabad, Peshawar)  
 Palestinian Authority (Ramallah)  
 Romania (Bucharest)  
 Russia (Moscow)  
 Rwanda (Kigali)  
 Sri Lanka (Colombo)  
 Tajikistan (Dushanbe, Khujand)  
 Thailand (Bangkok)  
 Timor Leste (Dili)  
 Ukraine (Kyiv)  
 United Kingdom (London)  
 United States (Arcata, New York, Washington, DC)  
 Vietnam (Hanoi)