

SWEET INNOCENCE



Photo: Amelie Benoist

CHEEKY CHILD: A boy is all smiles as he squats on a table and stares into the camera in a school in Dolkha district bazaar, Nepal. In a country, where most private schools are being re-opened after they were forced to shut down by the Maoists, this boy serves as an example of hope for this strife-torn nation.

Technology enables Manorama Online to reach worldwide

By Shruti Karthikeyan

KOTTAYAM: "The Malayala Manorama group follows a principle of 'anytime, anywhere' access with any device available that can deliver content," said Mariam Mammen Mathew, chief operating officer of Manorama Online.

She pointed out that Malayala Manorama has adopted new technologies to help its readers and is now reaching out to them with iPad, a tablet computer, comparatively bigger than a cellphone.

Malayala Manorama has a major presence in the online medium as well as in the mobile space due to the successful techniques adopted, that has contributed to the success of Manorama Online.

Most newspapers have linked with social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook making the dis-



Courtesy: Manorama

semination of news faster and easier, Mrs Mathew said.

"News updates and special stories can be shared with the help of these websites," she explained.

Mrs Mathew noted that Manorama Online has "visitors" from all over the world and is especially popular in the Gulf, the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

The website has more than one billion page views a month.

Mrs Mathew is a member of the governing council of the Internet and Mobile Association of India.

Manoramaonline.com was launched in 1997 and relaunched as a comprehensive portal in 2002 when Mrs Mathew took over as its CEO.

Although Manorama Online offers a localised coverage, the medium aims to further localise stories and cater to the interests of the people in remote areas too, she added.

Mrs Mathew explained that there are plans to expand the English version of Manorama Online by making it more user-friendly.

Conceding that "print journalism will always be there" but Mrs Mathew insists that the role that print format plays will change.

Former students reminisce about MASCOM experiences

By Chinnu Rajan

KOTTAYAM: This July will see the inauguration of the 10th postgraduate print journalism training course at MASCOM (Manorama School of Communication), an institute that many journalism professionals consider to be one of the best in the country.

Students who underwent training at MASCOM agree that the training has prepared them for newspaper work in the best way.

Shubhankar Adhikari, an eighth-batch student now with *The Telegraph* in Kolkata, said that bringing out MASCOM's lab newspaper, *The Fourth Estate*, was gruelling training in editing and page-making and the rigid deadlines were the closest

est a student could get to the actual process in the newspaper industry.

Business Line senior sub-editor Ram Mohan, who was in the third batch said MASCOM focuses on the basics.

"Though many deride such a teaching process, being strong in the basics is the only way to become a better writer or editor," he added.

Sanjay Shankar Pandey, a sixth-batch student, currently the senior sub-editor with the *MID DAY* in Mumbai, said, "I have no hesitation in saying I didn't know how to put words together and form a sentence before coming to MASCOM. But now I make a living out of it. Your entire career depends on what you learnt over there and not what you were taught."

Delhi-based senior Asianet reporter Deeku Sivadas, who switched to television after his training in print journalism at MASCOM said, "A student trained here is considered to be a proper



journalist."

A fifth-batch student and a subeditor at *The Hindu*, Bangalore, Shalin Thomas said, "The best people of the industry come as guest lecturers to teach and the guidelines they give certainly help."

Nirmala Nair, subeditor with *DNA* Mumbai and a sixth-batch student, said the training given in MASCOM is "exactly like working in



an actual newspaper. If you can survive 10 months of MASCOM, you can work anywhere."

Srinivas Ramanujam, a senior copyeditor with *The Times of India*, Chennai, said going out and looking for stories for the lab paper helped the students the most.

"If you can find stories in Kottayam, you can find them anywhere in the world," quipped the fourth-batch student.

The editing guidelines also helped him a lot, he added. "For instance, when I wrote 'per acre of land', KTO (as director K Thomas Oommen is widely known) told me, 'You can't have acres of water, can you?'"

Mr Adhikari was nostalgic when he recalled the frantic timetable at MASCOM. But he said, "Though the schedule is punishing, the newspaper world is much tougher."

"It was while working with my colleagues who are from other institutes, I realised the difference the MASCOM training makes."



Amelie Benoist

MASCOM welcomes France and Sri Lanka

By Rakendu Leo

KOTTAYAM: It would not be easy for someone born and brought up in France and whose staple food is pasta, to switch to a daily diet of rice and sambar. But, for 23-year-old Amelie Benoist the change was inevitable as she came all the way from France to study journalism at MASCOM.

Opting for a journalism school in India gave her an opportunity to explore South Asia, said Amelie, who also worked as a photographer in Nepal for a few months.

"I like to travel, meet new people and learn about different cultures," she added. But travelling comes at a cost and Amelie, who took two years to save the money she needed to study at MASCOM, advises, "We should be ready to sacrifice everything for our passion."

In Kerala, it is much easier to contact officials to gather information for her stories whereas in France, it is almost impossible to get even the contact numbers of the ministers, she noted.

Even though she misses French cuisine, Amelie said she has grown to like Malayalee dishes, of which appam is her favourite. Nadia Fazlulhaq, a Sri Lankan national, also trained at MASCOM for six months. She said her mother's fish curry is what she missed most.



Photo: Amelie Benoist

IMPROVING SKILLS: Sandra Oommen teaches Spoken English at MASCOM. Mrs Oommen stresses that as most newspapers receive news in English from agencies, vernacular journalists have to translate the items before publication.

Malayalam students improve English at MASCOM and add to their skills

By Shilpy Bisht

KOTTAYAM: Considering most vernacular newspapers like Malayala Manorama receive news from agencies in English, Sandra E Oommen, teaches spoken English to Malayalam stream students at MASCOM so they can handle copy in English.

Mrs Oommen has been training students, since the inception of the institute in 2002, to improve their spoken and written English.

For aspiring Malayalam journalists, Mrs Oommen said exposure to English is important in today's world.

Most of the students have studied English as their second language in school and college, but they lack exposure to English.

"Even if they major in English they do not use the language outside the class,

which makes them less exposed to the outside world," Mrs Oommen said.

"I try to improve their English-speaking skills, accent and vocabulary by holding discussions and making them read aloud excerpts from books in English."

"This will help them interview people in English."

Ansu Baby, who is a Malayalam stream student of the ninth batch at MASCOM, said these classes have helped

to improve her accent and pronunciation and this has made her confident in speaking English.

For two years now, MASCOM has been focusing on improving the English writing skills of Malayalam students.

"I don't teach grammar like in the fourth grade but I help them construct sentences using the right tense and idiomatic expressions," said Mrs Oommen.

"Moreover, I tell the students to translate their own articles of 'Jalakam' (Malayalam Weekly lab journal) into English."

Another student, Jaison Thomas, noted translation is an important element in Mrs Oommen's training.

"Each student translates Malayalam news stories into English, which helps us to cope with job tests as translation is one of the main requirements," he said.

Indian media gives short shrift to science, technology reports

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Science reporting in India can be compared to a simple food chain, say, of a tiger. The tiger, which is the final consumer, doesn't get the same amount of energy that the deer gets from the plant, due to the energy loss in every step.

Similarly, there is an information loss in every step of making a science report. It starts with the scientists, as some journalists blame them for not providing enough information.

"Research institutes in India do not have a systematic method to publish their work," said Gopal Raj, science correspondent of *The Hindu*. "And, it is not easy to talk to scientists."

But, the amount of research done in foreign countries is significant and most scientists publish their work as there are several reputed international journals.

So, Indian newspapers publish many stories about the discoveries and inventions at foreign research institutes.

The number of stories in some branches of science, carried in *The New Indian Express* (TNIE) and *The Hindu* during March, was estimated. While TNIE had 38 stories based on foreign sources and 31 on Indian sources, *The Hindu* had 22 and 55 respectively.

Scientists "treat the media as a necessary evil that creeps into their workspace," according to Pallava Bagla, a former

science correspondent of *The Indian Express*.

But, it is unfair to suggest that all the blame lies on the other side of the table.

After all, in communication, the medium plays the most important role and the problems and the solutions lie in the hands of the media itself.

Most reporters don't follow the scientific jargon. This either leads to misinformation or misconception.

"If inexperienced reporters meet scientists, they won't be able to understand what the scientists are talking about and the information published will be factually incorrect," said *The Hindu* science correspondent R Prasad.

And, if scientists are quoted wrongly, their reputation can be affected. So, they are reluctant to talk to reporters, Mr Prasad added.

Politics, crime and sex shape today's newspapers. So, most journalists want to advance to political or crime reporting and science is left in the hands of relatively young and inexperienced reporters.

This leads to a number of problems, the most important being that of reporters repeating technical jargon due to their lack of understanding. Young reporters fail to interact with scientists and do not cover spot-events. Reporters also plagiarise as they depend on foreign sources.

Finally, the role of editors come into play. Editors consider science a "soft" topic that doesn't boost sales. So,

very often science stories get killed, however good they may be.

Illustrations play a major role. Due to lack of backup photos and graphics, science stories get buried in one of the inside pages. Hence, science coverage is affected in every step and ultimately readers are provided with limited number of stories.

In order to carry the benefits of science to the public, scientists at the 23rd Kerala Science Congress, suggested ideas such as good communication between reporters and scientists, depicting stories in an attractive way, avoiding technical writing, localisation of science news and revival of traditional methods used in rural areas through writing.

According to science journalists, there is a healthy competition among Indian newspapers, which increases the chances of an improvement in science coverage.

Science journalism goes well beyond the mere communication of data. The logical and rational interpretation should come to the fore and enable the readers to shape their lives, ideas and thinking.

And, the importance of science can be established by Albert Einstein's quote: "Yes, we have to divide up our time like that, between our politics and our equations. But to me, our equations are far more important, for politics are only a matter of present concern. A mathematical equation stands forever."

Food Chain of a Tiger (energy loss)



Art: Saradha Mohan Kumar

Apathy, escalating costs stall Rs 60-crore waterways project

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It has been found that since the West Coast Canal is being developed for movement of bulk cargoes, the necessity to develop feeder canal system and navigable stretches of rivers from isolated areas to the main artery of water routes has become imperative.

Hence, Government of Kerala had undertaken a programme to improve feeder canals and modernisation of boat jetties.

However, by August 2005, Bhageeratha could complete only 12.43 per cent and the contract was terminated on Nov 14, 2005.

According to former Member of Legislative Assembly VN Vasavan, the feeder canals pilot project under Phase One is re-tendered and the pending works were handed over by KSTP to Messieurs Pilitech on Dec 22, 2007.

The contract included construction of approach road to Arpookara Road Bridge, Thiruvatta Road Bridge, Boat terminal building at Changanacherry, four steel foot bridges and 12 boat jetties at different locations on the Alappuzha-Kottayam, Alappuzha-Changanacherry and Kottayam-Vaikom routes.

The new contract was for Rs 6.5 crore and the deadline for completion was June 2009.

Pilitech civil contractor CS Abraham said the IWT gave only the remaining work of Phase One to the company. Out of the four steel bridges only Maniyamparambu footbridge is complete and the other three proposed bridges are at Karapuzha, Prapuzha and Pathinuril Chira.

Mr Abraham said the work on these three bridges were terminated as the people in these places wanted bridges, which would enable the movement of line boats.



Photo: Shruti Karthikeyan

MAKING WAY: A temporary bridge opens to let through a boat plying through Kodoor River. The bridge was constructed by local residents of Kanjiram in Thiruvappu panchayat.

According to Water Resource Minister NK Premachandran, the work on these routes got delayed due to inter-departmental problems.

Kottayam IWT engineer Binoy (who uses only one name) refused to comment on the delay. It is not clear whether all the work will be completed as the remaining amount of Rs 47 crore is likely to have lapsed.

A RTI response stated that the remaining amount of the project has been earmarked for different works in Phase One of the project. But, as per information gathered from KSTP and other sources, it is evident there is no remaining work in Phase One.

Although waterways is an economical and eco-friendly way of mass transportation, it is neglected by the government and neither the minister nor government is likely to take the responsibility.

During the inauguration of the Kollam-Alappuzha boat service in January, Transport Minister Jose Thettayil said, "We utilise only 20 per cent of our inland navigation potential."

It is the responsibility of the government to strive to develop inland navigation for the economic and social benefits of Kerala.