

## “Fight the Good Fight”: Intrepid Philippines Journalist Tells Indian Scribes

- *International news forum The Media Rumble begins in the capital*
- *Key issues of fearless but responsible journalism, gender parity, tech and innovation dominate discussions*
- *Podcasts to trend as democracy’s frontrunner*

**New Delhi. 03.08.18.** The opening day of the two-day international media forum The Media Rumble (India Habitat Centre, New Delhi August 3rd – 4th) featured some of the most experienced news professionals from across the world and India including Maria Ressa, Christopher Lydon, Raju Narisetti, Francesca Panetta, Manish Tewari and others. Conceived by the news and media critique website, NewsLaundry, and produced by pioneering entertainment and arts company Teamwork Arts, the first-of-its-kind forum returned with its 2nd edition to explore the three-sixty of news and what it can be.

The inaugural address marked the start of the forum where NewsLaundry’s founder and Editor-in-Chief Madhu Trehan spoke about viewing technology in news through the ruthless lens of responsibility, to which Sanjoy Roy, Managing Director of Teamwork Arts, said that journalism is at the forefront of war and that journalists hold the strength of democracy in the palm of their hands. They ended on a sombre note mentioning the magnitude of the task ahead for responsible and fearless journalism.

**‘Women Editors: Always the Bridesmaid’**, the first session of the day, discussed the role and perception of women and gender equality in media today. The panel comprised **Shereen Bhan**, Managing Editor at CNBC-TV18; **Durga Raghunath**, CEO (Digital) of *The Indian Express*; senior political journalist and presently Consulting Editor at *The Indian Express* **Coomi Kapoor** and **Maria A. Ressa**, CEO and Executive Editor of Rappler and formerly CNN’s bureau chief in Manila. Conversations ranged from a unanimous voicing of the repeated and unwelcome emphasis on a woman’s marital status, the need to rethink policies and benefits extended to women, as well as parities in compensation to male and female employees to which both Shereen and Maria observed the need for women to realise their worth and negotiate with the same tenacity that men do. Coomi however highlighted how women’s representation in newsrooms has gone up since the 70s, when the only women you would see were the secretaries. The panel discussed the blatant gender disparity still prevalent in the country’s vast language media.

Moderated by **Apar Gupta**, the panel **‘Minding the Media’**, which explored issues like licensing, policy and censorship of media, included **Nikhil Pahwa**, Founder and Editor of *MediaNama*; **Manish Tewari**, former Minister of Information and Broadcasting; **S.M. Khan**,

retired senior civil servant and former Press Secretary to the Hon'ble President of India, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam; and distinguished public policy professional, **Dr. Subi Chaturvedi**, currently President at YES Bank. Nikhil brought up patterns of content consumerism and highlighted how increasingly lower percentages, as low as 20% of advertising budgets, are going to traditional media like print and TV, who then try to generate "sensational" news which could border on fake news. The panel further discussed that while licensing was no longer a control mechanism for the government, the hardware of the digital media is still often used discreetly by governments to control news about political unrest. Manish Tewari pointed out the vast abyss of grey, which still dominates India's laws on cybersecurity and the internet.

In **'Podcasts: Will audio kill the video star?'** **Christopher Lydon**, the father of the podcast, discussed its invention and the perfect recipe for the revival of digital radio. Lydon said, *"There are no barriers to entry and any person can be a podcaster. Podcasts are inexpensive, liberating and provide a free space for doing things and creating a narrative which is needed when there is a perceived lack of depth in traditional media."* According to Lydon, podcasts are the real democratic medium which cannot be bought, sold or monopolized thus creating a transformational breakthrough in human conversations.

**'Journalism Resisting and Surviving'** had the intrepid and passionate Maria Ressa, former lead investigative reporter for CNN and CEO of Rappler, an online news platform which exposes fake news, questions government statistics and propaganda, and exposes a systematic attack on free speech via social media in conversation with **Hartosh Bal**, Political Editor at *The Caravan*. Maria candidly spoke about her work and how she has been hounded by a state-backed online hate machine, slapped with six different criminal investigations, accused of tax evasion, and receives 90 hate messages per hour to this day. And all this, for calling out the government! The Duterte government's use of social media in changing the public's perception of reality is its most powerful tool, said Ressa citing the government's modus operandi – "Using free speech to silence free speech". On social media, where algorithms celebrate popularity over veracity and where the loudest voice wins, it is worrying that the biggest megaphone lies with the state. *'Take the fracture lines of society and hit it with a hammer,'* said Ressa, is the motto of all populist governments today, who distort public perception and dilute focus on real issues like increasing corruption, state-sponsored violence and rampant inequality. Ressa further added, 'Democracy is in danger,' reminding journalists of the need to continue fighting 'the good fight'.

Should journalists take up public office or does it kill their credibility? The panel, **'Sleeping with the Adversary'** discussed this and much more. Pankaj Pachauri, founder and editor-in-chief of GoNews, said that the news media has become "self-serving" and "subservient" to the government of the day. Ashish Khetan, an investigative journalist turned politician (with the Aam Aadmi Party) and now a practising lawyer, believes that "as a journalist, you cannot express your allegiance". Trying to find a more nuanced view, **R Jagannathan**, veteran print

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journalist, digital commentator and editorial director of *Swarajya*, said, “We should not think that journalists are absolutely neutral or absolutely aligned.”

In the session ‘**Is There A Post Advertising Revenue Media Business Model?**’ the discussion veered around how innovation is the key to disruption in media revenue possibilities: these new avenues of revenue, felt the panelists, place power in the hands of the consumers who are in a frenzy of demanding content which is forcing the industry to pay attention to what the consumer wants and make connections between content and people. Raju Narisetti, former CEO, Gizmodo Group and head of strategy of NewsCorp, said “*We need to move away from the binaries of reader subscriptions and advertisements. As they have limited growth and scalability.*” In his view, one should feed into the other seamlessly.

The world over patriotism is being pitched as an adversary to journalism. Is it time for combat between jingoism and free speech? The last session of the day, ‘**Patriotism vs Journalism**’, started off with the moderator, Shiv Aroor mentioning the problems faced by journalists on social media who have a discerning point of view and how often the patriotism of a journalist is brought to question. Commenting on the theme of the session, Maria Ressa said, “I think journalists are patriots. We have to talk when people are being manipulated, when thousands die in a drug war. This is precisely why we do journalism.” Diplomatic editor of *The Hindu*, Suhasini Haidar stated, “Each time someone tries to stand up to a government policy, they are pushed aside as anti-national.”

The Media Rumble also featured interactive masterclasses and presentations on covering parliament, the state of healthcare reportage in India, freelance journalism, among others. *India’s Children: A documentary on Gorakhpur’s broken healthcare system* by Director Shweta Bajaj was well-received by the audience. The documentary *Raghu Rai, An Unframed Portrait*, shot by Avani Rai, gave a glimpse of the delicate bond between the father-daughter duo and captured the spirit of Avani’s renowned photographer father, Raghu Rai’s philosophy of work. The screening was followed by in conversation between Raghu Rai, Anurag Kashyap and Avani Rai.

‘**Creating Reality**’ had *The Guardian’s* Virtual Reality (VR) Executive Director, Francesca Panetta, in conversation with Durga Raghunath on immersive storytelling and how tech can be used innovatively in the news ecosystem. Panetta illustrated how VR can evocatively amplify stories for audiences giving the example of her work on prisoners’ experiences in solitary confinement.

The long day of deliberations ended with a special performance of *Aisi Taisi Democracy* – part stand-up comedy, part-musical and part-biting diatribe on socio-political issues – by Indian Ocean’s bassist and vocalist Rahul Ram, Delhi satirist Sanjay Rajoura and lyricist/comedian Varun Grover.

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On Saturday, sessions on media ownership responsibilities, undernourished reportage in far-flung small towns, and whether political cinema is possible in India anymore, along with film screenings and workshops, are on the anvil.

The full programme is available on <http://themediarumble.com/programme>

**EVENT DETAILS:**

**Dates:** August 3 & 4, 2018

**Time:** 9:30 AM - 6:30 PM

**Venue:** India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

**Entry:** Ticketing information and other booking details are available on the website. (INR 500 per person)

**Website:** <http://themediarumble.com/>

**For media enquiries,** please contact:

**Teamwork Arts**

Vidushi Khera: [vidushi@teamworkarts.com](mailto:vidushi@teamworkarts.com)

Deeksha Purohit: [deeksha@teamworkarts.com](mailto:deeksha@teamworkarts.com)

**Zimisha Communications**

Imtiaz Alam: [imtiaz@zimisha.com](mailto:imtiaz@zimisha.com)

Santosh: [Santosh@zimisha.com](mailto:Santosh@zimisha.com)

**NOTES TO EDITORS****ABOUT NEWSLAUNDRY**

Newslaundry is India's first completely subscription-driven, independent news media company. Newslaundry has been at the forefront of free speech advocacy and the need for an independent news model and a free and accountable press. Over the past few years, Newslaundry has been committed to presenting current affairs stories in innovative and engaging formats which include news critique, reporting, documentaries, podcasts, animation and comics. Newslaundry has been awarded the 2016 Ramnath Goenka Award for Investigative Journalism for its series on politicians misusing advertising funds of public sector companies for patronage.

[www.newslaundry.com](http://www.newslaundry.com)

**ABOUT TEAMWORK ARTS**

For over 25 years, Teamwork Arts has taken India to the world and brought the world to India. In countries such as Australia, Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Israel, Korea, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, UK and USA, Teamwork Arts produces over 25 highly acclaimed performing arts, visual arts and literary festivals across more than 40 cities.

Teamwork Arts produces one of the world's largest free literary gatherings, the annual ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival, international festivals Shared History in South Africa, Eye on India in the United States of America, India by the Bay in Hong Kong, and many more.

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