



## CHAPTER I

# OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH AND ESSENTIALS OF “PEACE” JOURNALISM

### 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, my submission sets the stage for the research by covering the following items :-

- (a) background to the resurgence of violence in Southern Thailand;
- (b) objectives of the research;
- (c) the Thai Government’s Arguments on the Conflict;
- (d) essentials of “Peace” journalism;
- (e) research bias and ideology;
- (f) selection of “The Nation” as case study; and
- (g) significance of knowledge.

### 1.2 Resurgence of Violent Conflict in Southern Thailand

Ever since the provinces in Southern Thailand were over-ran by Bangkok some two centuries ago, the area has risen in revolt roughly once every 20 years. Since January 2004, Thailand experienced a resurgence of violent and deadly disturbances in 4 of her 5 southern Muslim provinces. Up to date, more than 800 people have been killed in the violence. The resurgence of violence is marked by 5 notable events that occurred and these were the:-

- (a) 4 January 2004 raid on an ammunitions stockpile in a military camp;
- (b) 28 April 2004 Krue Se Mosque incident;
- (c) 25 October 2004 Tak Bai incident;
- (d) 3 April 2005 blasts at Hat Yai International airport, Carrefour supermarket and Green World Palace Hotel in Songkla; and
- (e) 15 July 2005 massive black-out and raids on cafes, hotels in Yala resulting in emergency direct rule being imposed by the Prime Minister.

Unlike in previous decades, when armed clashes between the separatist groups and security forces took place in remote hills, violence over 2004 and 2005 is tearing apart the very social fabric of the 3 provinces because civilians and soft targets (like schools, temples, restaurants and open markets) are hit. Much of the violence is caused by bombs triggered by remote mobile telephones and drive-by killings. The violence has affected both the local economies and the social fabric of these provinces. This fear that the violence will spread north and endanger their personal safety and threaten their national security.

The Royal Family, the Thai Prime Minister and very senior members of the Cabinet have made trips to the affected provinces for various purposes such as to calm nervous and frayed nerves, understand the issues better and to direct government responses to the situation. A National Reconciliation Committee has also been formed to help restore peace. However, there are no

signs that the violence will abate, even in the light of the tsunami disaster that struck Thailand.

The events unfolding in the South have textual contents that relate closely to the key topic on conflict and confrontation in Thai society. From a sociological viewpoint, conflict is inherent in states but violent confrontation needs justification. Apart from a Thai perspective, the radicalization of Islam in Southeast

Asia, deemed by some experts as an inevitable fall-out from global Islamic extremism, warrants a further consideration. This issue is a contemporary one of pressing concern to not only Thailand but to ASEAN.

### **1.3 Objectives of Research**

The two primary objectives of this thesis are to:-

- (a) examine the basis for the resurgence of violence in Southern Thailand and
- (b) analyze “The Nation”’s journalistic style and methodology for its contributions to peace in Southern Thailand.

Objective (a) entailed identification of the “actors”; root causes of the violent conflict and also explore possible and viable solutions to resolve the conflict. This research would help to provide answers to a very serious contemporary crisis in the nation’s history. Whilst objective (a) concentrated on

content, Objective (b) entailed analysis of style and methodology for peace journalism rather than conflict resolution.

#### **1.4 The Thai Government's Arguments on the Conflict**

At the outset, the Thai Government branded this problem to be the work of bandits and robbers and applied strong-armed tactics to quell the violence. Subsequently, the Thai Prime Minister ordered soldiers to guard temples and protect monks as a signal of the religious undertones in the violence. He also instructed the army to recruit voluntary soldiers to be ordained as monks and sent them to live in temples (Bangkok Post 23 June 2004).

On 29 June 2004, Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit unveiled a 'metropolis' plan for establishment of 'Maha Nakhon Pattani' that would grant the province some political autonomy in terms of overseeing its administration, collect its own taxes and elect its own governor (Bangkok Post 30 June 2004). With this political concession, the Government was optimistic that it would draw people away from the 'line of conflict'.

Come August 2004, the Thai Government appeared to have flipped its position and seemed to see economic under-development as a root cause for the violence. The Thai PM handed out economic carrots to the region, promising 20 million baht for road improvement projects, 42 million baht for reservoir projects and agreed in-principle to 160 million baht in-patient hospital and a 371-million Pattani Darussalam park project (Bangkok Post 28 August 2004).

At one point in time, the Government considered a scheme to zone the villages into 3 colours so as to concentrate its punitive actions on the “red” villages, deemed highly supportive of the insurgents or its general refusal to cooperate with the authorities. Furthermore, it also considered drafting more draconian legislation on security measures in the likes of the Internal Security Acts of Malaysia and Singapore. As the violence escalated in proportions, the Prime Minister changed 3 defense ministers and 3 commanders of the Fourth Army Region. The latest development is the declaration of emergency direct rule of the 3 provinces and a part of Songkla by the Prime Minister. This executive decree will replace martial law.

After flip-flopping through a series of initiatives, the Thaksin government still felt that military and forceful means will deliver the peace. The Thai Government seemed to have failed to recognize the complexity of the issue, particularly its reluctance to take on the issues pertaining to globalized Islamic extremism and respect for human rights within the Malay Muslim community. The state has, for sustained periods, ignored the basic human needs of an ethnic minority to have its culture and identity respected and for adjudicative justice. Being in disagreement with the Government’ stance, I hope that this thesis, through an inquiry of the peace journalistic efforts of the “The Nation” would add knowledge to this conflict.

### 1.5 What is Peace Journalism (PJ)?

Johan Galtung coined the term “Peace Journalism” in the 1970’s. Galtung noted that a great deal of war journalism was based on the model of Sports Journalism where there was a focus on “winning as the only thing in a zero-sum game between 2 parties. He propositioned that Peace Journalism should be more like Health Journalism. The Health journalist would describe the patient’s battle against a disease, the causes of the disease, remedies, and preventive medicine or measures or even alternative medicine.

The Peace Journalist would therefore focus on ways out of the conflict; building a solution culture rather than a violence culture. The “peace” journalist would map a conflict as a virtual roundtable of many “actors” and many issues, always avoiding a ‘tug-of-war’ approach to reporting conflict. Emphasis would be placed on reporting peace initiatives and shared goals of communities and state.

In view of the negative or ‘wicked’ connotation attached to the word ‘peace’ (Chaiwat 1987) as a consequence of the “Peace Rebellion 1952”, I have marked “peace” journalism in inverted commas. It is also my preliminary observation that no Thai journalist of the English media has “openly” proclaimed that “peace” journalism is practiced in his columns or editorials.

“Peace” journalism reports to defuse, not escalate the problem. A “peace” journalistic style would move beyond events-based reporting to a process-based reporting one. Besides reporting the bodily and physical damages, a peace

journalist would explore the deeper and more complex issues and seek out “players” who would be able to contribute to the peace-making process.

Hence, in the above ways, “peace” journalism is not “normal” journalism which generally report events and not processes. It is also not normal “victim” journalism with its focus on items of human interests and not delving deeper into the causes of suffering. It is not “violence” journalism which focuses on sufferings or victories. It is also not “propaganda” journalism that seeks to “cover up” untruths or espouse official nationalistic ideology. It is therefore not “convenient” journalism but requires a journalistic slant towards the mission of resolving conflict in a non-confrontational manner. A peace journalist seeks to create a framework to help its readers to understand all possible causes of the conflict. It is more than being descriptive of the conflict but provide analysis of the issues. It is more exhaustive as it seeks to constructively transform the conflict towards a path towards peace. These are the distinguishing features of “peace” journalism.

## **1.6 Research Bias and Ideology**

Having experienced first-hand the Indonesian Confrontasi in 1965 and the racial/ethnic riots in Malaysia and Singapore in 1969, it is my personal conviction that peace in this region is not to be taken for granted as a ‘given’. It is a treasured but fragile state of affairs. It is also my conviction and also as borne out by several international examples, that a combination of lethal and non-lethal means are required to establish, keep and build peace when violent confrontations have already broken out.

Lethal means are required because the perpetrators are a “layered” group – it ranges from the militant hardcore who would kill anyone who obstructed him; the aggrieved who suffered personal loss of lives in their families; the disenfranchised or dispossessed who had suffered injustice to the easily swayed and persuaded due to peer influence and so on. Lethal means alone, however, will not turn the lower layers around. Non-violent strategies and methods are required to resolve the conflict.

My assessment of “The Nation” is that it is very supportive of a peace process. Hence this research is to seek out and explore this ideological bias.

### **1.7 International Cases of Peace Journalism**

#### Nigeria

In late November 2002 (the Muslim month of Ramadan), the northern Nigerian city of Kaduna and capital, Abuja, erupted in ethno-religious violence. The violence was attributed to 3 reasons; the long-standing communal disharmony; the hosting of the Miss World Pageant during Ramadan; and the inflammatory print article alluding that the Prophet Mohammed would probably have chosen to marry one of the contestants if he had witnessed the beauty pageant. If the media can spark violence, it can also be a force for reconciliation and conflict resolution. This incident has been turned into a classic case study (like in law and business studies) for “Peace and Conflict Studies” in many universities.



### Bosnia-Herzegovina & Kosovo

The reporting of the war in the Balkans is full of examples of how some journalists suppressed and fabricated news that escalated the violence rather than contributing to conflict resolution. The first classic case is that of an emaciated Muslim Bosnian pictured behind barbed wires (when in fact it was the photographer who was behind the wires. The freed Muslim was walking home and the photographer was actually investigating an enclosure). The second instance was when the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) targeted civilians so as to draw the international community to intervene like it had during the Bosnian-Herzegovian conflict. The media profiled the violence without realizing that it was being made use of by the KLA. Had the media been more aware of the role of “peace” journalism, it would have done the Balkans a greater service.

#### **1.8 Selection of Case**

The English newspaper, “The Nation” has been chosen as an instrumental and revelatory case study to provide insight into a larger issue, that of peace and conflict resolution in Southern Thailand. The case really is of secondary significance. The newspaper will play a supportive role to facilitate our understanding of these issues as articulated by editors and journalists. The Nation is perceived to be the more ambitious; cutting-edge, analytical of local issues; and more critical of the government than the Bangkok Post. It has a more pro-active, preventive style of reporting than the Bangkok Post.

My observation is that it is very supportive of a peace process & initiatives. This submission, in the later chapters, will provide instances of this in terms of its :-

- (a) methodology;
- (b) linguistics;
- (c) use of re-prints of foreign media publications to lend support to its peace promotion; and
- (d) pro-active stance of forewarning and hence preventing more violence.

### **1.9 Significance of Knowledge**

The results of this research are three-fold, namely to :

- (a) contribute some new insights to the violent conflict;
- (b) contribute some ideas or concepts or principles of good peace journalism; and
- (c) develop a case study of the Thai English media's response to the conflict. This case study can serve educational purposes.