

China Inherits a Rich Social Legacy

On a sunny morning in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, 97 youngsters from Hong Kong were exchanging jokes and stories with 1,900 local teenagers.

Together they add up to 1997, and they were getting together for a mass, symbolic birthday party to celebrate the year in which Britain hands Hong Kong back to China.

"We're here because we know all share one future," said a Hong Kong girl in faltering Mandarin Chinese to the delight of a Beijing television crew.

The event was jointly organised by the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups and the All China Youth Federation, who have been developing links and exchange programmes since the mid-1980s, prompted by the territory's impending return.

Chinese government agencies looking for an alternative to the Maoist system — under which the state employer or commune took responsibility for social provision — have become increasingly interested in Hong Kong's highly developed community and welfare services.

Youth work is a good example.

"Before the 1980s there was no real youth work in China — it was mainly political," says Paul Chan, deputy executive director of the Hong Kong federation.

But today's market-driven China, where urban youngsters have more freedom and money than their parents had, brings new temptations and problems that political education cannot address — such as exposure to drugs and teenage sex, greater parental pressures to succeed at school, and alienation from an older generation with such different experiences.

The Hong Kong federation is well versed in such issues. Since the 1960s, it has been providing social work and counselling services in the territory's public housing estates. It now deploys 300 professional youth workers in 29 community centres, in schools and in two residential facilities for teenagers with learning difficulties.

For the past decade it has been sharing its experience with mainland counterparts, through staff exchanges, research and seminars on themes such as juvenile delinquency and teenage stress.

Chan has noted increasing professionalism in China and interest in services such as counselling, organising youth camps and running telephone hot-lines.

Many such links are developing in the field of social services. A survey in Hong Kong found that 56 voluntary welfare

Hong Kong capital investment has been a powerful force in the transformation of China's post-Mao economy. Other links have also been growing between the territory and the mainland, reports Gemini News Service, and these promise to have an equally important impact on the provision of welfare services.

Nick Young writes from Beijing.

agencies had recently organised exchange and training activities with mainland bodies.

Two to three Chinese delegations per week are visiting Hong Kong to study its methods, says Justina Leung, president of the territory's social workers' association. She also arranges study trips to China for association members. "Many of them just feel a mission to help China," says Leung.

Hong Kong's social-service delivery system is unique.

Most services are provided by non-government organisations. Dozens of voluntary agencies are involved in areas such as health, education, social work, community care and the rehabilitation of offenders and drug abusers.

The agencies receive government funding to cover most of their costs, topped up by grants from the wealthy Hong Kong Jockey Club, which distributes more than HK\$1 billion per year from betting receipts. The community chest also raises money from public donations — HK\$189 million in 1996 — which is distributed to 140 charities.

Some large agencies, such as the Tung Wah Group, offer a wide range of services. Founded by Chinese traders in 1869, it first offered free medical and funeral services to the needy, and set up the colony's first free schools for girls in 1931. It now has 50 service centres including hospitals, schools, homes for the elderly and rehabilitation centres.

Many smaller organisations focus on specific sectors, and may operate only one facility.

Waves of immigration from China have driven the development of this system. Faced with severe problems linked to overcrowding, the colonial administration gave land to churches vying for native congregations on the condition that they provided social services, and later encouraged relief organisations to work in areas such as literacy, vocational training, public health and establishing hostels for street children.

A strong voluntary sector emerged — absorbing and adapting international approaches to social services at a time when China was closed to the outside world. Hong Kong groups are now well-equipped to share their

knowledge and experience with mainland colleagues.

"We help them to develop concepts and try to help them start programmes that cater to needs rather than just having passive service provision," says Ng Shui-ai, director of the Hong Kong Christian Service.

Each year this organisation provides placements in its service centres for three or four students from a new social-work course in Beijing University. It is also one of six Hong Kong groups supporting a Guangzhou social-service centre which is running programmes in child care, youth work and community care for the elderly.

Other Hong Kong agencies support quite large programmes

in China. The Society for Rehabilitation has set up courses in rehabilitation medicine at universities in Hubei and Anhui provinces, and also works in orphanages throughout the country, helping children with cerebral palsy.

Nanjing orphanage in Jiangsu province is the site of a child-care workers' training centre, set up in collaboration with the Hong Kong Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service Centre. Staff have received special training in care of children with physical disabilities or learning difficulties.

Mainland bodies have also shown a keen interest in Hong Kong's way of dealing with the

rehabilitation of prisoners and drug abusers.

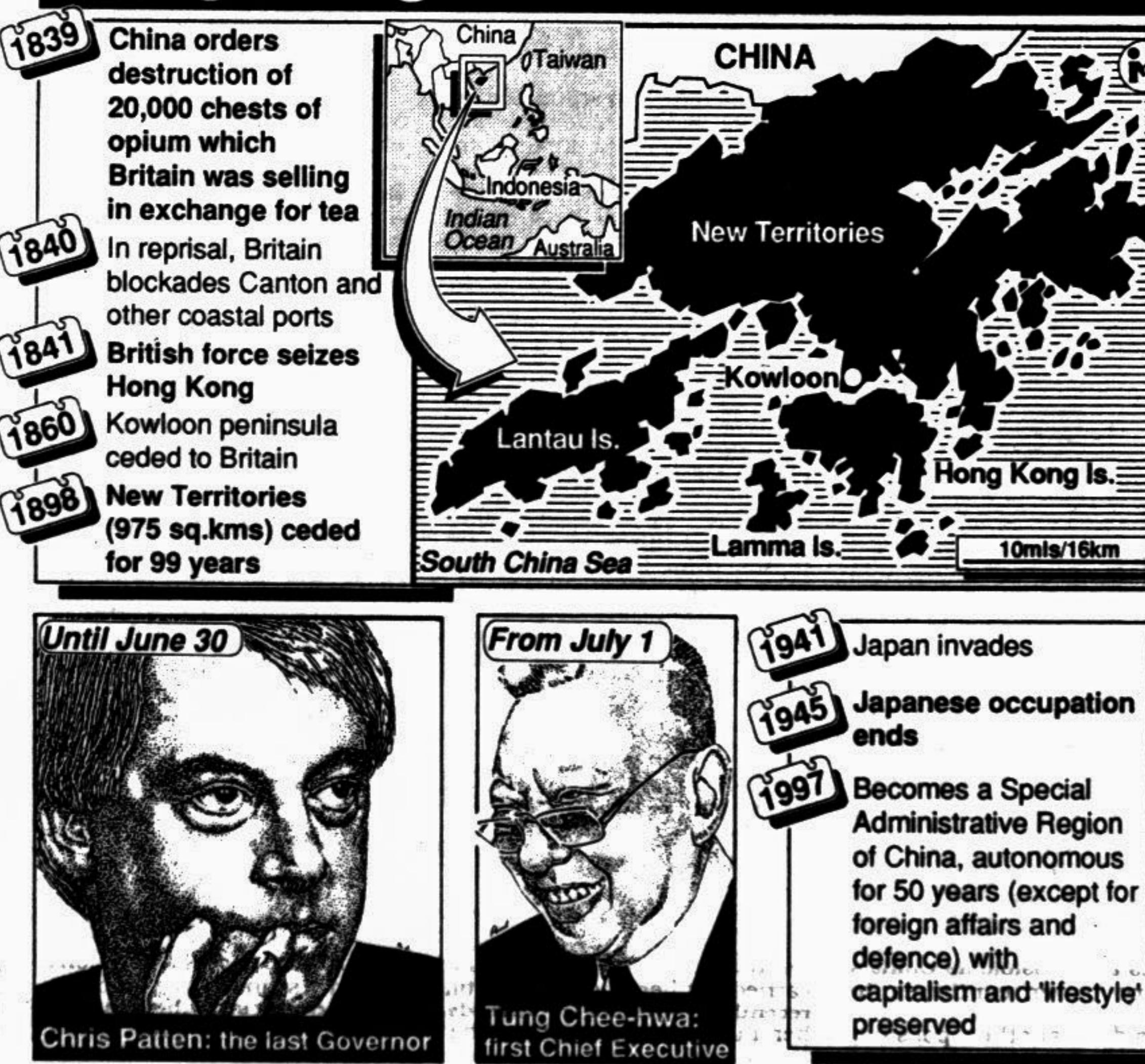
Meanwhile, in Shenzhen, close to the territory, the Hong Kong Family Welfare Association is working with the All China Women's Federation to assist local families and train welfare professionals.

"With a large number of split families waiting for permission to reside in Hong Kong, involvement in work in Shenzhen can also help our staff tune in to the nature of problems of people coming into Hong Kong," says Tom Mulvey, the association's executive director.

Social-work specialists from the territory do not simply wish to help China, but see the welfare of the new Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the rest of the country as being intimately linked. Their rich experience may prove a valuable resource for China.

The writer edits China Development Briefing, a bimonthly publication for international development agencies.

Hong Kong



British Monarchy : Yet Not Obsolete?

by A M M Shahabuddin

Queen Elizabeth II recently celebrated her birthday. She symbolises the time-honoured centuries-old British monarchy that has practically eclipsed the British political life for quite a long period. She herself is adorning the 'throne' for over four decades — a rather long 'innings' for her individual performance. But the question raised in this article is: How long the British people are agreeable to carry this 'burden'?

The difference between a horse and a British citizen is," said a leading Canadian national daily, "that horses like to come in out of the rain, while the British like to stand around in the rain, telling each other that their country has become a disorganised mess". The comments were, however, made some time back, not about the 'mess' created by the monarchy, but by the organisers of a popular horse race, the Kentucky Derby, pointing to the 'conflict' between "traditional practice" of race "behind a tape" instead of the modern practice of "in gates". The comments, however, can be aptly applied to the Britons' "traditional" honouring of the 'false god' of the monarchy, out of old diehard conservative habits, rather than take to modern practice of democracy sans the highly-expensive ornamentation, that is, the Crown.

Historically speaking, monarchy has become an 'institution' with the British with a time-honoured and long-drawn tradition, born of either forced or habitual obedience, allegiance or loyalty to all-powerful kings, perhaps tinged with an aura of divinity and awe-inspiring quality. It began in British history in the ninth century, when one Egbert, formerly an "English refugee" in the court of great Charlemagne, established himself as a "King" of Wessex in the year 802 and declared himself as the King of England in 828, thus laying the foundation of a living institution that ran into the present Buckingham Palace.

During this long hazardous journey of 'kingship' or 'monarchy', England has seen many 'ugly' and 'benign' faces of numberless monarchs, both 'home-grown' and 'imported'. In fact, England became a sort of 'playground' for kings of German, French and Norman origin, imposing their royal decrees on the British people. During the last 10 centuries or so, the British monarchy has travelled up-hill and down-dale with kings who were no better than absolute dictators, with all manifestations of their cruelty, ruthlessness, and debauchery, until the Victorian Age when the most refreshing look appeared, giving a new sense and more meaning to a cultured and civilised life to the British people, perhaps for the first time. So a change came from a period of awe and fear to reverence and

a sense of individual identity. In fact, during the last 10 centuries British monarchy has undergone a huge 'anatomical' changes, from 'absolute' monarchy to 'limited' to present-day 'ornamental' head.

The British Need Horse-sense

The present-day monarchy is nothing but a mockery in the name of Parliamentary democracy to serve as a 'link', whenever necessary, for the continuity of administration or the government. But the Brits have been carrying on, or made to carry on, this 'unnecessary' burden, paying through their nose as tax money, that goes for the pomp and show of the Crown. This is being done because they have developed a prejudiced concept of the 'crown' or 'monarchy' out of sheer conservatism, born, out of diehard habit and so-called 'tradition'. Thus the Brits lack that much-needed 'horse-sense' to tell them when to change their position 'out of rains' into the 'shelter'.

In this context I am tempted to share a popular joke about British conservative habits. When American 'fast-food' was first introduced in London, the Londoners came to the new 'food-shop' to have a taste of the new food. But the first thing they were looking was not for food but (can you guess?) fork and spoon to eat fast-food!

Annus Horribilis for the Crown

Some four years back, Queen Elizabeth II described the year 1992 as *annus horribilis* (bad year) for the House of Windsor, perhaps the worst year for the British Crown since, say, Cromwell. The Royal family was made a laughing stock by a section of media, both at home and abroad, with juicy stories of nauseating scandals and ridiculous 'adventures' made by some of the leading Royal family members, including the heir-apparent to the throne Prince Charles and his wife Diana, Duchess of York, shaking the whole institution of monarchy at the very roots. It is quite natural that some would like to give an early farewell to these obnoxious parasites.

Down-hill Slide of Monarchy

The down-hill slide of monarchy has acquired such a tremendous momentum that debates on its future have been

taken up by the electronic media also. The US cable network CNN, in its popular feature programme, *Crossfire*, went for an interesting discussion to ascertain whether the monarchy in Britain was "still on" or was it "obsolete". But the discussion became mired on the question of the Queen not paying taxes" (though resolved later). It must have raised long waves across the Atlantic. And recently, at home, a British television telecast a similar interesting debate on the British monarchy. Whatever may be the immediate reaction on the British people, one thing is certain that the upcoming dark shadow is gradually looming large on the horizon. And as they say, "a word to the wise is enough". A prestigious British journal recently said: "The emotional case for keeping such a long-standing institution is a strong one: It is a link to tradition and to history, and is a strong trade-mark for Britain." If that be the case, then many would like to suggest that the most befitting place for the 'crown' to rest is the British Museum for posterity to study it as a 'missing link' in the British history.

This would also provide the British people to look around and evaluate for themselves what a vast change has taken place in the psyche of peoples in their former colonies — now better known as 'Commonwealth members'. Most of them have discarded the 'crown' as their symbolic Head of the State. Only two of their 'Commonwealth cousins' — Canada and Australia — are still bowing to the Crown. Even these two countries are flying low, being on the verge of cutting off their "umbilical cord" from their mother". And Canada which has already replaced the Union Jack with their own national flag with emblem of red maple leaf, is on a step forward to go ahead. A Canadian analyst recently said that there are many "young fogies" who believe that the Crown has become just another tooth-fairy or Santa Claus myth in our lives which we would be better without. So a change is inevitable when the new generation is more empathetic to go without the 'Crown' — as an anachronistic and outdated 'left-over'.

It would, therefore, be a welcome gesture if the British 'monarchy' or the Crown makes a graceful exit from the turbulent national scenario, then being thrown out rather disgracefully in no so distant future. As they say, 'coming events cast their shadows before'. And the dark shadow of the ominous coming events is gradually getting darker for the Crown to take note. Better late than never, the time is also ripe for the Brits to 'read the leaps', as they say, and follow the way in which the wind is blowing.

NYONE who values the spur to revitalization and problem solving that is already being evidenced by civic journalism projects can't help but cheer as this phenomenon gains a foothold in a growing number of communities across the country. But given what's at stake, community leaders, civic activists and public officials cannot afford to be only cheerleaders. They need to get off the sidelines and become active players. Indeed, they need to suspend disbelief and view civic journalism as a community team sport requiring their active participation.

From Advocacy to Engagement

Viewing journalists as potential allies rather than "the enemy" presents a great challenge for many activists. It requires shift from well-practiced modes of advocacy to less familiar forms of engagement with the media. Mind you, I didn't say stop being advocates. Advocates for children, for example, have well-developed antennae that perceive and evaluate issues on the basis of their impact on children. That perspective is vitally important and shouldn't be checked at the door when community activists participate in civic journalism projects. The challenge, however, is to give up the answer-driven and publicity-driven approaches that are familiar patterns of behavior when activists deal with the media.

Answer-driven, advocacy doesn't work because, at its core, civic journalism is about asking a new set of questions, engaging a community in problem solving by helping readers and viewers focus on, understand, and listen to their own and each other's solutions. Publicity-driven modes don't work because civic journalism, for the most part, plays back the voices of citizens and expands the inquiry beyond the usual "experts" and sources to reach deeply into the community it serves. It's not a matter of telling "good" stories. It's not about showcasing the "good" work of civic organizations working with youth, or highlighting "good" teenagers to offset the negative images of youth violence portrayed on front pages and TV news screens.

Why Change?

There's a whole new set of skills to be learned to engage the media in new ways. The examples of successful civic journalism projects described in this journal should provide much of the incentive necessary to make civic activists and public officials want to get involved in this new field. Let me suggest at least two public interest ob-

Of Pay and Pay Commission Views from India

T Ananthachari writes from New Delhi

within office hours.

One cannot but comment on portions of the Summary of Recommendations. While declaring that "with regard to the edge in pay scales that is currently enjoyed in respect of three scales of pay by the officers of the Indian Administrative Service and Indian Foreign Service, the Commission has not found any persuasive reason to disturb the same and as such the replacement scales have been suggested. In order to set the controversy of a single examination at rest, the restoration of the old system of examination which used to prevail before 1979 has been suggested". A reading of the above would indicate that the method of recruitment should be tailor-made to justify disparity in pay scales among various Services instead of being based on the requirements dictated by the jobs and responsibilities entrusted to them.

Similar exercises have been gone through by some of the States to deal with the problem of "house peons" and "orderlies". It is well known that ultimately the cash allowance given to employ a peon or orderly did not put a stop to utilising official manpower as in the past. In effect, the allowance became just an addition to the emoluments under a "cover" name! Also, the recommendation presumes that all officers are required to work at home beyond office hours. Why should this be so? Should we not think of a work culture that government servants fully utilise their time in office for only office work and as a matter of practice, are not required to carry their office to their homes? It is not clear if any thought was in fact given to such a step. At this rate, one should not be surprised if government servants of and above a certain level are authorised "punkha pullers" at home on the ground that power failures are frequent, instead of thinking in terms of encouraging people to opt for "inverts". Incidentally the institution of "punkha pullers" was in vogue when I entered service in 1956.

The other recommendation relates to "transport allowance". The Commission has at best succeeded in bridging the gulf between the emoluments of government servants in general and those outside it. In terms of cost effective administration, appropriate and selective use of technological gadgets for achieving such goals, it seems to have stumbled and generally shown unusual indifference.

The most striking example of such an approach by the Commission is in respect of the recommendation regarding "telephone attendant allowance". To say the least, this recommendation is feudalistic in concept as well as practice. At a time when telephones with recording facilities and message forwarding facilities are very much in vogue in the country — not to forget cordless and cellular phones — it is certainly an act of great extravagance and disregard for modernisation which alone can lead support to a recommendation of this kind. Why should a government servant need a spe-

edge the countervailing forces here. Political rhetoric to the contrary, a really engaged citizenry is often a scary notion for public officials and administrators. It raises the specter of angry citizens at hearings and other pressures. An informal citizen involvement spurred by journalists, rather than organization newsletters and "alerts" is a threatening concept for many organizations that are membership-structured and dues-dependent. But one can only argue that those in the public as well as the nonprofit sector who can wholeheartedly embrace and be effective catalysts for this type of community participation and revitalization will find themselves revitalized.

What are the New Roles?
No one has written the play book, much less the rule book, to guide civic sector/media partnerships for civic journalism. This is an emerging phenomenon and there is much learning, as well as much establishing of trust, to be done on all sides. But as inquiry and experimentation proceed, I'd like to lay out the three most ambitious goals. They are to start, to strengthen and to sustain civic journalism in our communities.

Strengthen
The civic sector can do more than act as a cheerleader when an editor or station manager initiates a civic journalism project. When you consider what's at stake, civic journalism is too important to be left entirely to journalists. The civic sector needs to build the "demand" side of the civic journalism equation. Definitely not old style demand that translates as insistence on coverage, but market driven demand — a clear message from the citizenry served by local media that encourages the leadership at these outlets to initiate civic journalism-style coverage and projects. Even with the growing monopolization of ownership, these outlets are, of necessity, responsive to consumers. This is especially true of television stations, because they are often fiercely competitive in local markets. We need to develop the skills to approach local outlets with civic journalism success stories — measured in community outcomes as well as ratings — and serve as a catalyst to introduce and initiate new projects. To be sure, there is as much skepticism on the newsroom side of the playing field as there is in the civic sector about foraging these partnerships. It will require new approaches from the family breakfast table to conversations with co-workers, to street corner and backyard fence conversations with neighbors.

Encouraging Democratic Broad-based Citizen Participation
Civic journalism offers the opportunity to expand civic participation beyond our usual measures of voting or meeting attendance. When community-wide dialogue is fostered by media outlets, it brings a topic into focus for a large percentage of the citizens. Because it raises questions and features "real" citizen input, not just the usual array of experts, it encourages average citizens to become engaged with the questions, to see themselves as some part of the answers. The dialogue is not limited to formal organizations, but is more likely to move from the family breakfast table to conversations with co-workers, to street corner and backyard fence conversations with neighbors. It's important to acknowledge that these partnerships are not viewed as advocacy in disguise.

Courtesy: National Civic Review