



**Nita Bhalla of Thomson Reuters Foundation Named Journalist of the Year at
SOPA 2017 Awards**

*Scoop Awards go to Thomson Reuters, MLex Market Insight and WeMedia01
Record number of entries, quality of reporting, 95 awards demonstrate that 'real news' is
thriving*

Keynote speaker ex-HK Governor Chris Patten discusses erosion of rule of law in HK

Hong Kong, June 16, 2017 – The Society of Publishers in Asia (SOPA), a Hong Kong-based not-for-profit organization, named Nita Bhalla of Thomson Reuters Foundation the Journalist of the Year at the SOPA 2017 Awards Gala Dinner on Thursday evening for her reporting on human trafficking and slavery in South Asia.

Awards for Scoop of the year across the three award categories – global, regional and local media – went to Thomson Reuters (“The Bangladesh Bank Heist”), MLex Market Insight (“MAXpower Bribery Scandal in Indonesia”) and WeMedia01 (“新界套丁風雲系列” or “Abuse of Policy on Village Houses in New Territories”).

These awards were among the 95 SOPA Awards for Editorial Excellence announced at the event (see the full list [here](#)), now in its 19th year. The SOPA Awards, widely considered the most prestigious in the Asia-Pacific publishing industry, this year saw a record number of entries competing in 17 categories, including more than 750 English or Chinese-language submissions by global, regional and local media across the region.

The entries were assessed by a judging panel appointed by the Journalism & Media Studies Centre (JMSC) of the University of Hong Kong. The panel comprised more than 100 media professionals, including journalists, editors and columnists from some of the region’s most influential publications, along with academics from a number of Asia’s leading journalism schools.

“The SOPA Awards provide a platform to honour the best reporting, writing and design in publishing in Asia Pacific,” said S.K. Witcher, Deputy Asia Editor of The New York Times and Chair of the SOPA Editorial Committee. “Congratulations to all the winners. By recognizing their best practices, we hope to inspire journalists to keep pursuing excellence in their profession, delivering the information that matters, bringing crucial issues to notice and further guarding freedom of the press.”

SOPA Awards Head of Judges and Associate Professor of JMSC Jeffrey Timmermans said: "Despite all the recent controversy about 'fake news,' both justified and imaginary, this year's SOPA Awards finalists incontrovertibly demonstrate that 'real news' - accurate, deeply reported journalism on topics of profound human interest - is thriving."

Chris Patten Comments on Rule of Law under ‘One Country, Two Systems’

The keynote speaker at the dinner was Hong Kong’s last governor Chris Patten. Speaking by video from London, he shared his thoughts on ‘One Country, Two Systems’ as Hong Kong prepares for the 20th anniversary of the Handover.



“There has been a steady tightening of grip on Hong Kong's windpipe, on Hong Kong's autonomy and on its ability to do things for itself,” said Mr. Patten. “You've seen that, I think, in the extent to which Beijing's offices in Hong Kong try to get involved in every branch, every aspect of government, you've seen it in the attacks on the judges and the rule of law. I sometimes wonder whether Chinese officials actually understand what the rule of law means.”

A recurring topic of conversation at the awards dinner was that of ‘fake news,’ which itself has spent much of the past 12 months actually in the news.

Christiane Amanpour, CNN's chief international correspondent and a noted campaigner for press freedom and the rights of journalists, also addressed the gathering by video from London.

“I feel that journalism faces an existential crisis – a threat to the very relevance and usefulness of our profession,” said Ms. Amanpour, who is on the board of the Committee to Protect Journalists and the Center for Public Integrity. “Now more than ever, we need to commit to real reporting across a real world – in which journalism and democracy are in mortal peril – including by foreign powers like Russia paying to churn out false news and hacking into the democratic systems.”

About 300 media executives, editors, journalists and industry practitioners from across the region attended the gala event.

The SOPA 2017 Awards for Editorial Excellence are supported by Invest Hong Kong (Platinum Sponsor), Google and Facebook (both are Gold Sponsors). FleishmanHillard, Media OutReach and High Technology Printing Group Limited provide SOPA with support respectively on public relations, newswire and printing services.

Event highlights, photos and judges' comments, plus videos/transcripts of both Mr. Patten's and Ms. Amanpour's speeches, can be found on: <https://www.sopawards.com>.

About SOPA

The Society of Publishers in Asia (SOPA) was founded in 1982 to champion freedom of the press, promote excellence in journalism and endorse best practices for all local and regional publishing platforms in the Asia-Pacific region. SOPA is a not-for-profit organization based in Hong Kong and representing international, regional and local media companies across Asia. The Society of Publishers in Asia is also host to the prestigious annual SOPA Awards for Editorial Excellence, which serve as the world-class benchmark for quality journalism in the region. www.sopasia.com

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