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should be placed on remedial measures, such as adjourning defamation trials to allow controversies to die down and permit the possibility of rational decision making. The High Court decision on political advertising (ACTV c Cth), which has been widely seen as endorsing the principle of freedom of speech, leaves many questions unanswered, Walker said. The right to discuss matters of a political nature is not absolute, and permissible restrictions still need to be worked out.

Dr Peter Putnis (Bond University) said that the issue of the right to privacy was equally worthy of consideration. He gave instances of potential invasions of privacy in the electronic age such as the use of file tape in TV news and computerised tampering with photographs.

He said the public have a right to speak as well as a right to know, and public access to the new media is important. Public support for freedom of speech cannot be taken for granted. Many may see it as the freedom of the media to demand answers from an unwilling person.

Jim McClelland, speaking from the perspective of lawyer, former politician and now newspaper columnist, said that defamation law was the greatest inhibitor of freedom of speech in Australia. Politicians in particular had used it both to gag the media and to enrich themselves. He asked what possible harm had been done to the reputation of Bob Hawke, a politician who had won many lucrative awards for damages, when for many years polls showed him to be Australia's most consistently popular public figure and Prime Minister? McClelland said he himself had been demonstrably defamed some years earlier while a judge, but had taken no action since he considered that no reasonable person would believe him capable of the corrupt behaviour alleged against him. □

## INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS

- The Chinese Government, in an attempt to stop encroachments from foreign-controlled satellite television services like Star TV, has outlawed the non-authorized sale of receivers and barred individuals from installing them. In a similar move, the Burmese Government has introduced a stiff impost in the form of a licence fee on equipment at a level which would be beyond the reach of almost all Burmese, plus huge fines for breaches.
- National public broadcasting is fighting back in Scandinavia, where public broadcasters in Sweden, Norway and Finland have joined up to establish a satellite pay TV channel which will deliver programs - films, news, sport, music and children's - with a strong emphasis on cultural relevance. If approved by their respective governments, the service will begin in '94-95.
- The Brits are moving towards pay per view services delivered over the telephone system using ADSL-copper-twisted-pair technology, and although the regulatory authority OFTEL has yet to consider this development, it appears that - as in Australia - there will be little possibility of regulating the services thus delivered.
- The proposed merger of two giants, cable company Tele-Communications Inc (TCI) and Bell Atlantic, has somewhat overshadowed another move with similar implications. BellSouth (the largest US Bell telephone company by 1992 revenue) will buy a 22.5 per cent stake in Prime Management, the 24th largest cable operator controlling systems with over 500,000 subscribers.
- Mexico's private cinema chains, representing about half the country's cinemas, have joined up to counter the threat of US dominance of Mexico's exhibition sector, and will screen more domestic product. □

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