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Rappoteurs' Reports

CONSULTATION ON PRESS SYSTEMS IN ASEAN
JAKARTA

Rappoteurs' Reports

Topic : The Thai Press System
Session : 10.30 - 11.30 hours, August 23, 1988
Chairman : Mr Kadir Jassin
Speaker : Dr Pira Chiraspone

Discussion

- Q. How are Thai journalists trained and where do they get the idea of their press system?
- A. Journalistic training is done by mass media companies themselves. There is no special agency engaged in journalistic training. Discussions are underway between universities and publishers on increasing opportunities for journalistic apprenticeship.
- Q. How does Thailand marry the monarchical system and the Western ideas of the press system?
- A. The Thai people are very receptive to Western ideas. The Thai press shares the responsibility as a watchdog. It is not adversarial to the government as a whole, but towards individual officials.
- Q. Have there been any revocation of publication licences in Thailand recently?
- A. The Thai press at present enjoys considerable freedom and there have not been any recent revocation of printing licenses.

Topic : The Indonesian National Press System : Past,
Present and Future

Session : 11.30 - 12.30 hours, August 23, 1988

Chairman : Mr Kadir Jassin

Speaker : Dr E. Janner Sinaga

Discussion

- Q. A Thai delegate commented that the Pancasila is very interesting and he saw a similarity between the principles of Pancasila and those of Buddhism which call for responsibility. However, he saw no fundamental difference between the Asian and the Western press systems. Touching on the Old and New Orders, he said the most important thing is whether there is more or less control.
- A. The Western and ASEAN press systems are fundamentally different. There is a dilemma within the Western press because its aim is life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness which ends up with the survival of the fittest. We are free and responsible. There are 260 publications run privately in Indonesia, except one or two run by the Armed Forces. We have a Press Council which consists of the representatives of publishers, academicians, mass media and the government. There is no censorship in this country. We cannot yet afford free press without responsibility. The journalists are free to write but they must be responsible. The Indonesia press practices self-control based on the Pancasila philosophy.
- Q. How does the Indonesian government handle differences in

interpreting Pancasila?

A. The People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) in 1978 elucidated on the Pancasila principles and decided on the establishment of a special body in charge of propagating and enhancing the perception and implementation of Pancasila principles in everyday life. All the rules and technicalities are clear cut.

Q. Is there any sanction if journalists make errors in interpreting Pancasila?

A. We assume that journalists are patriotic and know all the rules. The newspapers have a built-in control system and the editor is responsible for anything printed in his paper. The government tries to educate the foreign reporters and explains the impact of their stories and asks them to correct their stories. If this educative and persuasive approach is not heeded, Indonesia, as a sovereign country, has the right to say that "your presence is not desired here".

Q. Is there any control of the press and have the Indonesian press people ever questioned the application of Pancasila?

A. I do not control the press as you might think. My job is to educate, assist, supervise, and only if necessary, to reprimand and punish them. The press persons are free to ask questions. The Indonesian Press Council often submits suggestions. There is a lot of criticism in the press. Of more importance is the way or how the criticisms are presented.

Q. How many publications have been closed so far?

A. Percentage-wise, those which have been closed down are very small. We first serve them oral, then written warnings (several times). Only after all these warnings, will the license be revoked.

Q. Has the Indonesian government taken measures if the press makes mistake and who is in charge of taking the measures?

A. Other government ministries or agencies which are dissatisfied with press reports convey their grievances through the Information Ministry which will then take the necessary measures.

Q. Can the Indonesian press be outspoken in its criticism?

A. It relates to the different styles of presenting stories or articles.

Q. Does the Indonesian press have access to documents on any issues, including on graft and corruption issues?

A. In fact, press reports on corruption often help the government uncover malpractices or graft practices. The government also often reveals corruption cases which are discovered and discloses the amount of losses caused by malpractices.

Q. Does the Indonesian press disclose the names of people involved in corruption cases?

A. Only the initials of suspects or defendants still under court trial proceedings are mentioned. The press is not allowed to name names in such cases.

Q. Is there different treatment for military and civilian personnel?

A. No different treatment.

- Q. What measures are taken against foreign correspondents if they are considered to have made mistakes?
- A. Suitable personal communications with the foreign correspondents greatly help improve their understanding about Indonesia.
- Q. What is the price of truth?
- A. It depends on how you look at that matter.
- Q. Have any regulations been devised to promote freedom of information and access to information?
- A. We do not apply a punitive approach on the press. The press has free access to information.
- Q. How does the government react to reporters who aggressively seek truth against the whims of the government?
- A. It depends on the issue. We cannot talk in generalities. The press council is consulted before any press publication license is revoked.

Topic : The Malaysian Press System
Session : 14.00 - 15.00 hours, August 23, 1988
Chairman : Mr. Thepchai Yong
Speaker : Dr Syed Arabi Idid

Discussion

- Q. How does the press as a subsystem of the national system in Malaysia function?
- A. Malaysia also has a philosophy called Rukun Negara. But the difference with the Pancasila of Indonesia is that the Rukun Negara has not yet a legal foundation i.e. It has not been

integrated into the Constitution. The Malaysian press is not adversarial, but it can criticize the government.

Q. Does Malaysia have journalistic courses that propagate non-Western models of journalism?

A. We have not yet a non-Western model of journalism. But we want to build Malaysian value-laden journalism.

Q. To whom the press is accountable?

A. The press is accountable to its readers, shareholders and the government as the issue of the publication license. We also have principles, but they have not yet been stipulated into the Constitution. We practice productive conformity which is a state between being docile and dynamic equilibrium.

Q. Does the Malaysian press have editorial independence?

A. We do have editorial independence; otherwise nobody will read or buy our paper.

Additional points by presenter

Privatization has been encouraged and has led to influence from business and advertisers.

There is an overwhelming concern for national unity. Clear and definite government guidance is reflected in press laws and regulations, including licensing requirements. Newspapers also exercise internal controls.

Topic : The Philippine Press System
Session : 15.00 - 16.00 hours, August 23, 1988
Chairman : Mr Thepchai Yong
Speaker : Dr Doreen Fernandez

Discussion

Q. Who controls the social controller?

A. Control is exercised by the press, the code of ethics through organizations such as the Philippine Press Institute, and through education of journalists in ethics and practice. The Press is responsible to tell the whole truth. It is a medium through which information is brought to the people. It has to be free and responsible, aware of its role of information, education, bearer of culture and tradition, critic and check on the conscience of government.

Q. Is there press censorship in the Philippines and what sort of control does the President impose on the press?

A. No control at all. We have no censorship whatsoever. President Aquino is now working at building a new relationship with the press. She is trying to develop her own system of partnership with the press. There is no government control. Freedom has led to yellow journalism, but we feel that responsibility will grow.

Q. How are the code of ethics enforced?

A. The code of ethics is enforced by the Philippine Press Institute and every journalist has to sign the code. Several newspapers also have ombudsmen.

Q. Does the Americanized Philippine press want to learn something from its neighbouring countries?

A. There has been an increasing awareness of the need to learn from our neighbouring countries. But we are still too America-oriented. We don't know much about our ASEAN neighbours. But the fact is that we are getting very

conscious about the need to learn from our ASEAN neighbours.

Q. Does the Philippines have an ideology like the Pancasila in Indonesia and Rukun Negara in Malaysia?

A. Yes, we would like to. The Filipinos are now in search for their own national ideology and identity. Indonesia is fortunate for being able to preserve its national identity despite the long colonization. The problem is that the Philippines had two colonizers. First, the Spanish and then the Americans.

The government support is embodied in the Constitution and laws. Although a national ideology has not been articulated these laws are part of the search for a national identity.

Topic : The Singapore Press System
Session : 16.00 - 17.30 hours, August 23, 1988
Chairman : Ms Toeti Adhitama
Speaker : Mr Basskaran Nair

Discussion

Q. What is the background of the change in the nature of relationship between Singapore and the western press in the 70s and in the 80s and Singapore's most recent move to invite more foreign journalists from its neighbouring countries.

A. Being a free society must not be equated with the western concept of liberal democracy. The western press has intentionally interfered in the domestic affairs of Singapore. The invitations to the journalists of

neighbouring countries were prompted by the awareness that Singaporeans are living together with their ASEAN neighbours.

Q. Does the popularity of foreign publications in Singapore indicate that the Singaporeans need an alternative press?

A. There is no need for an alternative press. What happens is that the people -- due to their higher level of education -- need more to read.

Q. Does the absence of criticism in the Singapore press indicate that there is nothing to criticise or that there are no critics in Singapore.

A. There is a lot to criticize, but there are also many ways to convey the criticisms other than writing in the newspapers. The people express their views through dialogue meetings, which prove to be much more effective than writing in the newspapers.

Q. Please elaborate on the accusation of the Marxist conspiracy.

A. Like in Indonesia and Malaysia, Singaporeans must be watchful against the danger of communism.