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Media Monitors In Indonesia

By

Abdul Razak
1. INTRODUCTION

a) COUNTRY PROFILE: "A Melting Pot of Asian Races"

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago (made up of 13,666 islands) to form a single state has a total land surface of 5,193,166 square kilometers, 84 percent seas and 16 percent land. The country stretches from East to West (5,152 kms) and from North to South (1,770 kms), spanning the Asian and Australian continents. It stands like a sentry guarding the sea avenues and trade routes linking the Pacific with the Indian Ocean.

From 60 million people before independence in 1945, Indonesia's population, now increasing by 1.7 percent a year, has grown to 187.6 million (1993), placing the country as the world's fourth most populous after China (1.1 billion), India (897.4) million and USA (258.3 million).

1Paper presented to 'Seminar on Media Monitors in Asia', AMIC and Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, June 29- July 1, 1994.

2Permanent Secretary, Confederation of ASEAN Journalists (CAJ), Jakarta
Bahasa Indonesia, which was proclaimed as the national language since the Youth Pledge of 1928, is spoken by almost all. In addition, some 365 dialects (other estimate: 583 dialects), are spoken by approximately 300 ethnic groups.

Despite the ethnic diversity, the Indonesians place national unity above all else. Different ethnic groups contribute to the fairly heterogeneous character of the people despite their common Malay heritage.

Indonesia is the home of four main ethnic or racial roots, the proto-Austronesian, the Polynesian and the Micronesian, which are subdivided into hundreds of ethnic population groups and sub-groups, each having its own cultural and social heritage.

The Melanesian race constitutes the majority, which includes major groups such as the Minangkabaus, the Bataks, the Malays and the people of Aceh, Palembang and Lampung, all living in Sumatra; the Sundanese and Javanese, the Balinese, the Dayaks of Kalimantan, the Bugis and Toraja of Sulawesi.

The peoples of Maluku (Moluccas) and Irian Jaya represent the Polynesian and proto-Austronesian traces. The Micronesians live in Indonesia’s far eastern regions.

The country has long been host to migrants from Asia, Arabia, and Europe. The Chinese, now more than three million, have adopted the Indonesian nationality.
The migrants brought in their ways, customs and the major religions, the Islam, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism, to enrich the Indonesian cultural legacy.

Roughly 90 percent of Indonesia's 187 million people adhere to the Islamic faith, making Indonesia the world's largest Moslem country. Yet, it is not in the formal sense a Moslem state and the Constitution guarantees freedom of worship for all. Protestants make up 5.8 percent, Catholics 2.9 percent, Hindus two percent, Buddhists 0.9% of the people, and a number of mystic-religious sects subsumed under the 'kepercayaan'.

Literacy rate now stands at 85 per cent and life expectancy at 62 years.

The Indonesian economic system, as stated in Article 33 of the Constitution, is administered as a collective endeavour based on fraternity. The land, water and all the riches contained therein shall be controlled by the state and used for the people's maximum prosperity. That's why, vital sectors that provide public goods for the largest number of people shall be stated-controlled. However, this provision does not forbid private interests to do businesses. Private domestic and foreign investors are welcome to provide capital and skills and make profits in promoting long-term national development.
b) CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Indonesia is a unitarian republic with a democratic system based on the five-point principles of 'Pancasila', which expounds belief in one God, unity (in diversity), just and civilized humanity, democracy, and social justice for all. The Pancasila, which is stated in the Preamble of the Constitution, serves as the fundamental law, the supreme source of laws and social values.

People's sovereignty is delegated to the People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, MPR), the highest authority of the State, which draws up the constitution and formulates state policies for the government to implement. The Majelis comprises the whole members of the 'Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, or DPR' and appointed representatives of social, professional groups and regional territories throughout the country to embody the 'total and overall representation' of the "whole people" in the country. Consequently, the Majelis membership also comprises legislators and executives of the political and administrative structures, and thereby giving no division of power as intended in the 'trias politika' concept.

The Majelis elects the President and the Vice President for a five-year term. General elections take place every five years to elect members to the Majelis (Assembly) and the Dewan (House of Representatives).
The President, who heads the government, appoints cabinet members, top administrative officials, ambassadors, and the chiefs of the Armed Forces.

The Republic is made up of 27 provinces, each being run by a governor who, along with the provincial legislature, administers his territory.

The Constitution (article 28) says that "freedom of association and assembly, freedom of expression in writing and the like, shall be prescribed by laws." Two political parties, the Development Unity party (PPP), the Indonesian Democratic party (PDI), and the 'functional groups' Golongan Karya (Golkar), dominate the political system. The 'ABRI' (Armed Forces), which is an entity in itself and is legally legitimised as a socio-political force, plays a crucial role in the system. The ABRI has a 'reserved' 100 seats in the House to compensate for their not voting in general elections.

Indonesia’s political scene does not reflect the Anglo-Saxon parliamentary system, where cabinet members are appointed by and held accountable to the Dewan (House). Instead, Indonesia follows a "presidential system" wherein the president gets his mandate from the 1000-member People's Assembly (made up of 500 House members and 500 appointed representatives of the regions and administrative structures and social groups). The system rejects a 'trias politika' division of power.
The president holds an executive power of the government and the Armed Forces. He is assisted by cabinet members whose power does not depend on the 'Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat' or DPR (House of Representatives).

The Dewan is the legislative branch in the power structure. Cabinet members work with the House in drafting laws and state budget. But they are accountable only to the President, and not to the House in a formal sense. A minister's position is not dependent upon the House. Unlike in the Anglo-Saxon parliamentary system, the incumbent president cannot dissolve the House. The President, the highest executive of the government and the State, is accountable to the Majelis, and not to the Dewan (House).

Decisions in the Dewan and Majelis shall be made on consensus (mufakat), worked out through deliberations (mushawarah). In practice, this decision-making, requires behind-the-scenes consultations to smooth out conflict in advance of open discussions. Voting is frowned upon.

Judicial power rests with the Supreme Court to supervise the practice and conduct of judicial power.

c) MEDIASTRUCTURE AND LAWS

The Indonesian Constitution (article 28) states that "freedom of association and assembly, freedom of expression and thoughts in writing and the like, shall be provided by law."
This provision gives a mandate to the Minister of Information to draft laws on the press for passage by the House and to supervise that media act in accordance with the laws and regulations. The Press Acts of 1966 and 1982 state that "no censorship or bans shall be applied to the National Press." Nevertheless, legal statutes enacted by the Ministry of Information (Permen No. 01 of 1984, Article 33), known as 'The SIUPP Law', have had the effect of negating these general principles.

The Press Act (No. 21 of 1982) prescribes duties, functions and procedural requirements for the press to operate, and gives a licensing power, a government's powerful tool, to control the press. Publications must obtain a Press Publication Business License (Surat Izin Usaha Penerbitan Pers, or SIUPP). And by law, all publications must be run by press corporations, owned and managed by Indonesian citizens.

The SIUPP Law allows the Minister of Information to revoke licenses if he, after consultation with the Press Council, thought "the press corporation and the press publications concerned no longer reflect a sound, free and responsible press."

Publishing a newspaper or magazine without a SIUPP license can result in the editor being sentenced up to three months in prison or fined up to 10 million rupiah (US$4,500).
Under the anti-subversion law, individuals who "disseminate feelings of hostility or arouse hostility, cause social splits, conflict, chaos, disturbances, or anxiety" may be punished in court.

Article 154-157 of the Criminal Code (KUHP) forbid the publication of statements that "incite feelings of hostility, hatred or insult" against the government or ethnic or religious groups.

Article 160 outlaws statements that "counsel disobedience to the public authority." Article 134 stipulates punishment for making public statements deemed to be "deliberately intended to disparage the President or the Vice-President."

The 'SARA' rules, which were promulgated by the now defunct internal security agency Kopkamtip, the Operational Command for Restoring Security and Order, bar journalists from reporting on subjects thought likely to incite ethnic, religious, racial or intergroup tensions. In the Indonesian language, suku, agama, ras, and antar golongan, formed the acronym SARA, combining the first letter of each word.

Anything, issues or events, that may rock intergroup harmony are off-limits to reporting. Bringing up these issues from the plane of violence to the plane of discussion, if not careful enough, is likely to generate tensions and social disruptions, jeopardising national stability and harmony.
Indonesia now has 126 dailies, including three English-language dailies, and 85 weeklies, 35 bimonthlies, and 62 weekly magazines.

Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI), a state-owned national network, and TVRI, a state television, operate nationwide. Apart from these, some 900 private commercial and non-commercial radio stations are on air. Four private commercial TV channels -- RCTI, TPI, Anteve, SCTV -- provide viewers with alternative broadcasts and freedom of choice.

The Palapa satellite communication has enabled TV and radio networks to beam to most areas in the country. With over 600,000 satellite dishes installed in private homes and hotels, mostly in capital cities, viewers now can also tune into foreign TV broadcasts, such as CNN, CFI (French), RTM (Malaysia), Thai TV, ATV1 (Australia); STAR TV (Hong Kong), etc. The influx of "borderless" visual and audio transmissions has become a reality, bringing in both positive and negative impacts.
2. NATURE OF MEDIA MONITORS AND MECHANISMS

In this paper, the term "media monitor" replaces "media watchdog", which is perceived in the Indonesian context as a Western and unpalatable notion to certain people in the media and government.

A media monitor is defined as an institution, either government body or non-governmental professional body, having a regulatory function over the media and an authority to address public complaints and to set the standard for monitoring and improving media performance. A case study is provided here to identify the institutions that regulate media and journalists and illustrate the ways regulations and monitoring are carried out.

a) CASE STUDY

Banner Headline:  
*Tempo, DeTIK, Editor lose their licenses*

Three major news magazines, *Tempo*, *Editor*, and *DeTIK*, lost their publishing licenses yesterday (June 21, 1994) for repeatedly ignoring the government’s warnings about the way they reported news events and managed their editorial operation, *The Jakarta Post* reported Wednesday, June 22, 1994, in a banner headline.

Director General for Press and Graphics Subrata announced the government’s decision at a hastily convened press conference at his office.

Subrata signed the letters revoking the licenses on behalf of Minister of Information Harmoko, and these were presented to the proprietors of the three magazines yesterday afternoon.

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1 *Jakarta Post, June 12, 1994.*
The move was based on a 1984 decree by the Minister of Information which regulates the "SIUPP" -- the license for publications.

'Tempo', was faulted for the way it reported news recently, Subrata said, without referring to any specific articles. However, when asked if the decision was based on Tempo's coverage of the government's procurement of German warships, he did not deny it.

Subrata said 'Tempo' had been given six written warnings, including three stern ones, and 33 verbal warnings since it reappeared in 1982, after it was temporarily closed for the way it reported the general elections.

He recalled in 1982, 'Tempo' publishers and editors pledged to help maintain national stability and public order, to refrain from reporting divisive stories, to maintain the good name and integrity of the government and the national leaders.

"We've been forced to take this step for the sake of development of a free, healthy and responsible press, and national stability," he said.

'Tempo' first hit the streets in 1971 and has since become the nation's leading weekly news magazine, providing insightful reports and analyses of events.

The 'Editor' and 'DeTIK' (time seconds) were faulted for violating the license terms.

The 'Editor', which was founded in 1987 mostly by former Tempo journalists, has since 1989 been managed by people entirely different from those named in the SIUPP license.

By regulation, the magazine had to notify the changes in the top three management posts (chief editor, publisher, and general manager) to the ministry of information within three months.

The 'DeTIK', the newest of the three and the most aggressive in their investigative reporting of current events and issues. Some even considered it to be the "vanguard of the political openness and press freedom."

Subrata said 'DeTIK' had moved away from its original mission, as stated in its SIUPP issued in 1986, which was to report on detective and crime news.
Since 1993, 'DeTIK' changed format into a tabloid and has been reporting general and political news. Its editor has been repeatedly warned and told to go back to its old format and mission.

Subrata said in all three cases, all proper procedures were observed by the government, including the written and verbal warnings. He said the Press Council, the industry's watchdog, had been consulted.

The move came less than two weeks after President Soeharto made harsh remarks that some newspapers and magazines had been fanning controversy over the government's purchase of warships from Germany to the point of creating instability.

Minister of Information Harmoko had since warned that the government was considering possible actions against publications which had violated the journalist's code of ethics.

In its last edition, DeTIK's Letter from the Editor column was typed in white with a black background, pledging allegiance to the state and concluded: "We will continue to think independently."

The 1984 ministerial decree, which empowered the Minister of Information to revoke media licenses, has been the subject of controversy among many people in the press industry. They said licensing runs counter to the 1982 Press Law which guarantees press freedom.

Two Jakarta-based newspapers, 'Sinar Harapan' (Ray of Hope) and 'Prioritas' (Priority), were closed down in 1986 and 1987 respectively. But the papers resumed publications under new managements and names: 'Suara Pembaruan' (Voice of Renewal) and 'Media Indonesia'.

In 1990, a Jakarta weekly tabloid 'Monitor' lost its license and its chief editor was subsequently sent to jail upon convicted by the court.

b) POST-MORTEM ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The story was displayed by newspapers in banner headlines, indicating the magnitude of gagging the press, which was publicly perceived as a "regrettable tragedy" and "political setback" to press freedom.
The report in the case study points to the following institutions, officials and persons as having the regulatory power to sanction the media.

(1) THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION

The minister, who has often publicly proclaimed that "my blood, flesh and bones remain a journalist", stands out as the most powerful authority to sanction the press. He has the 1982 Press Act and related SIUPP regulations to monitor and regulate the media.

The Law requires publications run by press corporations to obtain a Press Publication Business License (Surat Izin Usaha Penerbitan Pers, or SIUPP). SIUPP replaced a previous requirement in the 1966 Press Act stipulating that all publications must obtain a permit, Surat Izin Terbit, or SIT. But the SIUPP Law is more all-inclusive than the SIT; it applies to press corporations rather than individual publications.

The SIUPP empowers officials to vet key staff. Publishers and editor-in-chief have to submit a police report certifying their non-involvement in the past "opposing Pancasila" activities. The Minister approves a new staff after a license is issued.

The SIUPP may be revoked when publications fail to meet various technical production requirements, such as page size, the ratio of advertising to news (should on average cover only 30 percent of the maximum 20 page-dailies).
The Minister may revoke licenses if he and the Press Council, a government-formed body, thought "the press corporation and the press publications concerned no longer reflect a sound, free and responsible press." Violation of the Press Act can result in a jail term or fine.

Monitoring print media is done by the Ministry's Director General for Press and Graphics (PPG). For electronic media, TV, radio and movie films, the Director General for Radio, TV and Film (RTF) is in place to do likewise.

(2) THE PRESS COUNCIL

The Council serves as a policy-making body on print media-related matters, and assists the Minister of Information, in promoting the development and interest of the national press. It has existed under the 1966 Press Act, which was incorporated into the 1982 Press Law.

The council has 25 members: five government officials, eight representatives of the Indonesian Journalists' Association, six from the Publishers Association, one each from the associations of graphics and printing, of media advertising agencies, and four scholars and education experts representing the society.

The members, eligible for a second five-year term, are nominated by their respective professional organizations. The Minister of Information approves the nominees and submits the list for formal induction by the President.
The minister and his director general for press and graphics are ex-officio chairman and executive secretary of the council. A 7-member executive board runs the council's day-to-day operation, led by the council vice-chairman and secretary, plus five members.

The council derives its authority from the State Constitution that says in Article 5 (2) "the President shall determine the Government Regulations necessary to implement statutes" and the Press Act (Article 6). The president, in a 1984 decree on Press Council, stipulates the status, duties, functions and authority of the council. That's why the council members are inducted and dismissed by the President upon recommendation of the Minister of Information.

As stipulated in the Presidential Decree (No.1/1984), the Council:

a) assists the Minister of Information in drafting press laws and regulations.

b) establishes and promotes positive interactions between the Government, the Press and the Society on the implementation of responsible freedom of the press based on the principles of Pancasila.

c) assists the Minister in providing guidance on the idealistic objectives of journalism and press management, including institutional development in journalism, management, printing and advertising, especially print media advertisements.

d) assists the Minister in evaluating the usage of facilities provided for the press by the Government.

e) monitors and evaluates the observance of the Code of Ethics in journalism, advertising, management of the press establishments.

f) initiates endeavors to promote the growth and development of the National Press.
The Council of Ethics, known as 'Dewan Kehormatan', is an autonomous body within the structure of the Indonesian Journalists' Association (PWI). It has nine members, comprising senior editors, lawyers, political science and communication scholars. The PWI Congress elected the council chairman and executive secretary for five years. Council members were nominated by the chairman and confirmed by the PWI Executives Board.

The Council has its mandate from the Congress to monitor and scrutinize violations of the Code of Ethics and receive readers complaints about media performance. It monitors published stories for alleged violation of the Code of Ethics and looks after reader's complaints over unfair, inaccurate or insensitive press reports.

The Council recommends sanctions against violators to the PWI Board. Sanctions correspond to the magnitude and seriousness of an offense. Corrective "penalty" takes the form of a written warning that calls on an editor or reporter to rectify a story concerned.

If an editor refuses to comply, the Council suggests to the PWI Board to suspend the offender's PWI membership for a maximum of two years. In case of serious offense, allegedly criminal in nature, the Council may advise complainant to pursue legal measures in court.
For instance, in 1983-88, the Council received from public readers 645 written complaints seeking redress for inaccurate or biased reports. In a press release (October 31, 1988) the Council stated that the media in big cities tended to increasingly ignore the Code of Ethics in competitive scrambles to win readers and advertisers.

The Council sent 47 signed reminders to media editors. An editor of a weekly paper was suspended from the PWI for two years for refusal to give due response to reader's complaint. (Figures for 1988-1993 are not available).

(4) CODE OF ETHICS

The self-imposed Code of Ethics, which was formulated by the Indonesian Journalists' Association, calls for enforcement mainly on a journalist's professional conscience. And imposing sanction is the prerogative of the Association. But the authority may reprimand the press for failure to adhere to the Code of Ethics.

The 6-point Code of Ethics states that Indonesian Journalists should self-guide by the 'Pancasila' principles. Journalists "shall consider with full responsibility and discretion the desirability or appropriateness of news, articles, photographs, cartoons to be published."
The press "shall not publish item that may be destructive and detrimental to the Nation and State, or incite social disorder, or be construed offensive to the moral standards, religion, belief or faith of persons or groups protected under the Law." Journalists shall perform duties freely and responsibly in the best interest of public safety, and shall not abuse the profession and skills for personal motives or group self-interests.

Article on "Methods of Reporting News and Expressing Opinions," states that news reports or articles must not carry "erroneous accusation, rumor, sedition that may endanger the security of the Nation and State." Reports must be "free from slander and misrepresentation of events." They shall resort only to fair, open and honest means or effort to obtain news, photographs and documents.

Journalists shall honestly report and interpret news, making sure to their best knowledge and ability, not to distort the truth through exaggeration or improper emphasis.

Journalists must do their best to verify the truth in his/her reports or articles and the source credibility through "check and recheck" (double checking) process before the stuff is ready for publication. He shall make every effort to be objective, honest and fair, and refrain from reporting which may effectually destroy the reputation or honor, or violating a person's privacy.
A person, who feels aggrieved by inaccurate press reports, shall be given the 'Right of Reply'. The reply must be inserted on the same page, with the same length/space, on condition that the response or rectification is properly written.

The rest of the Code is essentially no different from other Code of Ethics.

(5) CODE OF ETHICS FOR PRINT MEDIA ADVERTISEMENTS

The Indonesian Advertising Agencies' Association (PPPI) has its own Code of Ethics and Practices adopted in 1981. It says that "advertisement should not offend, degrade or ridicule any religious faiths, moral ethics, traditions, cultures, racial or interest groups." Advertisements must never incite tendentious hatred to the effect of antagonizing racial, sub-cultural, or ethnic groups in Indonesia.

Called the 'Tata Krama and Tata Cara Periklanan Indonesia', advertising agencies have to abide by a 20-page detailed code of ethics specifying the conduct relating to all aspects of the industry.

(6) PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION (Self-monitoring Bodies)

Professional organizations also have self-monitoring bodies that affect media performance and standards.
a) INDONESIAN JOURNALISTS’ ASSOCIATION (PWI)

The association is the sole, legalized professional organization, as stated in a ministry of information decree (Menpen No.47/1975).

Membership is compulsory for all working journalists. Membership suspension may be imposed on a journalist upon recommendation of the Council of Ethics for violating the code.

The Central Executive Board, on its own initiative or together with the Press Council and the Indonesian Publishers’ Association, has issued statements that call on government and private institutions to deny access to news sources for a reporter who fails to show on request his/her accreditation card.

A journalist must hold a Press Card, which carries the signatures of his chief editor and the chairman of the Indonesian Journalists’ Association.

Anyone applying for a SIUPP from the Ministry of Information must have the editor recommended in writing by the Association, whereas a publisher by the Indonesian Publishers’ Association.

b) INDONESIAN PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION (SPS)

A publisher must acquire a written recommendation from the association to be allowed to publish a publication. In applying for a SIUPP, the letter should be submitted to the Ministry of Information.
Unlike in Commonwealth countries where journalists form trade unions that bar executive and management level personnel to become members, Indonesia's publishers are also editors or journalists. The PWI memberships are also open to reporters as well as editors and publishers.

3. ASSESSMENT OF MECHANISM

(a) GENERAL VIEW

Indonesian journalists are expected to balance their legally guaranteed rights to freedom and self-expression with responsibility to avoid the perceived dangers of abuse of freedom, and abuse of the power of restraint. Abuses may originate from the press and from those using media for self-interests at the expense of broader national interests.

As a social institution, the media are called to disseminate truthful and objective information, articulate people's aspirations and provide a forum for constructive social control. The Press Law (No. 21/1982) states that the national press "shall support nation building and be an active partner in national development to promote and enhance social harmony, national unity, help mould national identity, explain issues and policies to facilitate their implementation."

The press must "exercise self-restraint and good sense to prevent misunderstanding and tension between different ethnic, racial and religious groups."
This provision was formulated on the assumption that the press can inflame or cool ethnic tensions in a diversified country.

The media face constraints to the full exercise of press freedom. Restrictions stem from self-restraints to balance freedom and responsibility in promoting political stability, economic development, social justice and national cohesion.

When national interest -- unity, stability and harmony -- are at stake, the media would be called, most of the time, to be the first to set aside temporarily their freedom. Reporting sensitive issues, which are peculiar to Indonesia's cultural, political and ethnical backgrounds, demands full sense of responsibility.

(b) MECHANISM OF POSITIVE INTERACTIONS

The Indonesian press is neither "the Fourth Estate" nor an "adversary" towards the two other components -- the Government and the Society -- in the political system. Instead, the system seeks to forge partnership, cooperative and functional relationships, mutual trust and fraternity, accountability to public. This is pursued through a mechanism of positive interactions between the Press, Government and Society.
The interactive communication, a "tripartite" model, goes in multiple directions, vertically top-down and bottom-up and horizontally (among and between social institutions or groups). Periodic dialogues are held to reduce dissonances arising from perceptual differences on the status, role, rights and duties, freedom and responsibility of participating "actors" in the political system and on matters of public concern.

The government, the "supra-structure", is made up of the Executive, the Legislative and the Judiciary. The press and social institutions are the "infra-structure." The press, an intermediary, is expected to inform and give people simple, clear "guides" to reasonable actions. Media help public to gain adequate understanding of policies, and preferences to participate effectively in the political process.

In any State, the government is constitutionally empowered to administer public affairs, deliver common good, makes regulations. The administration occupies a central, dominant position and role. As such, its policies and actions affect the entire society. The government should be accountable to the public.

The government is a major source of information on public affairs. Media need information as much as the government depends on the press to convey messages.
The press reports actual situations in the field, to give feedback and social control, "an early warning" to problems that may bring serious implications if left unattended on time. Therefore, the Press and Government relations should not be antagonistic or adversarial.

The Society needs both the Press and the Government. The Press expects people to express opinions and thoughts freely and responsibly on how problems affecting them be resolved. They have the rights to do so and the press articulate them.

The society and the government should be open and accessible for information, opinion of public interest. Information must be traded off openly among and between the "actors," provided that the release of information would not endanger national security.

What makes a democracy sustainable are the intermediary groups or associations that bring people together to formulate, articulate, crystallize opinions and aspirations to form collective bases for political actions. Experiences proved that getting messages across the nation through the press is much faster than through the bureaucratic network. That is how an interactive and positive communication is carried out to come to a common ground in treating nationally important problems, issues and public affairs.
(c) METHODS OF CRITICISM

Positive criticism has a greater probability of getting it accepted. "How you say it" is more crucial than "what you say." Media report public criticism with well-reasoned arguments as part of its social control function. But to be effective, critiques should be couched in the language of diplomats, who say one thing with a subtle allusion to mean another thing. Criticism must be expressed without embarrassing anyone or institution on a spotlight of public shame.

Social control, which is guaranteed by the Press Law, should be conducted in a constructive manner -- identifying problems and causal backgrounds, suggesting solutions and comparative advantages and disadvantages of each proposed way-out, and showing the likely outcome.

According to an Indonesian sociologist, public criticism should be presented like 'jamu' (herbal medicine). Though it tastes bitter, it helps to preserve health. Dilute the bitter taste by mixing 'jamu' with sugar, a technique of "sugar-coating" in critiques, to make the pills look attractive, digestible, palatable, and 'sexy'.

Criticism should address policies and implementation problems, and not pinpoint directly and openly to the persons, who are, in fact, responsible for the matters.
(d) PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS

When in doubt, Indonesian media people are called to fall back to the 'Pancasila' that gives the characteristics of the press system. The system is said to conform with the country's cultural, political, economic aspirations, and historical background.

Any system has its own particular set of assumptions and arguments about Man, role of the State, the position of individual in society and the ways media function. In Indonesia, an individual is perceived as a holistic being -- rational and emotional.

The Press Act obliges the press to adhere to Pancasila as fundamental guiding principles, a primary source of law, patterns of thinking, attitudes, behavior and actions. As one whole intact philosophy of life, Pancasila is operationalised as follows:  

a) 'Belief in God', provides freedom to profess a religion of one's choice. Mutual respect should prevail.

b) 'Humanity' implies respects for equality of human dignity, of rights and duties, and high regard for humanity.

c) 'Unity' calls for priority on unity, national interests and well-being above private, personal and group interests.

d) 'Democracy' calls for consensual decision making with due respect to majority and minority interests.

e) 'Social justice' calls for balancing rights and duties, respect for people's rights, eagerness to help others, joint efforts in achieving equitable progress for all.
(e) SENSITIVE ISSUES

Constraints to press freedom also applies to reporting sensitive issues, assuming that there would be more losses than gains when public debate goes out of control.

The four sources are (1) 'suku' (ethnic groups), (2) 'agama' (religions), (3) 'ras' (racial issues), and (4) 'antar golongan' (inter-group conflicts).

Self-restraints are expected of journalists to avoid disrupting social harmony, national unity and stability, which are indispensable preconditions to allowing people to concentrate on the most important tasks.

(f) PROFESSIONAL GUIDELINES

Basic Ideas

The idea that the "press exist to facilitate people exercise rights and needs to communicate, a basic requirement to live, survive and grow to their fullest potential" has been tossed around through various fora held by the Indonesian Journalists' Association. The assumptions are that media assist people to understand their environment -- what fellow members do for themselves, what Government undertakes in behalf of people and for people -- so that every individual or group can do on its own volition what's necessary and good for himself and the society.
A society is made up of diverse individuals, each playing different social roles. Different people tend to see and respond differently to challenges, problems and duties facing them. A person's needs, interests, perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, sub-cultural and ethnical preferences are likely to influence one's reactions. Reactions and responses may be rational and/or emotional, constructive or destructive, and between the two extremes, depending on situational exigencies.

For journalists to contribute services to the society, the proposed guidelines, taken from the writer's own notebooks over these years, would probably help.

1) Write reports, opinions or comments without a lead to confrontative atmosphere between different racial, ethnical and religious groups that make up the fabric of society. Strive at all times, instead, to promote harmony, mutual respect, tolerance, deference, unity among them.

2) Report information after proper checking of the truth, especially on issues related to religions, races and ethnicity that may be socially and politically sensitive and disruptive to unity in a society.

3) Honestly report and interpret news, making sure to the best of one's knowledge and ability that no essential facts are suppressed or distorted through exaggeration or improper emphasis that may incite social unrest or feelings of hatred and restlessness.

4) Report public criticisms and fair comments on institutions in a manner that contributes to a fuller understanding of the subjects as part of press freedom and responsibility.

5) Public figures and authorities must also refrain from releasing statements, formulated in a manner that may be construed differently or incorrectly by the public. Inaccurate press reports originate from the press and public officials.
6) Public authorities should feel obliged to give adequate access to information on matters of public interest, to enable journalists report correctly and responsibly, and avoid misunderstanding or misrepresentation of facts.

7) In a democratic society, the people have a legitimate right to know and access to information on public policies and affairs which affect people’s livelihood and concern.

Journalists must act in good faith as an intermediary and facilitator of public discussions on matters of national interests, and make every effort to bring social conflicts from the plane of violence down to the platform of reasonable discussion.

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