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Country Report On Indonesia

By

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SEMINAR: MASS MEDIA AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE

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PAPER: COUNTRY REPORT ON INDONESIA

BY

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READ BY

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1. The mass media in Indonesia has a historical background which is closely related to the national movement to gain national independence and the struggle to improve the life of the Indonesian people.

The Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) was born on Indonesia’s independence day at ten o’clock in the morning on August 17, 1945. From the days of the revolution to the present, RRI has sought to keep its pledge of threefold loyalty by being nationalist but nonpartisan, striving to keep the country independent, but standing above all political currents and party interests for the sake of national unity. Radio Republik Indonesia has functioned as an effective communication media to keep up the people’s fighting spirit during the war of independence, whilst the press as was the case in other Asian countries has become one of the mechanism used by leaders of national movement to disseminate their ideas to the people.

That is why the press in this country has traditionally been a "presse d’opinion" rather than "presse d’information".

National leaders like Sukarno, Hatta, Syahrir, Haji Augus Salim, Sam Ratulangi etc. were regular writers or columnists of national newspapers and some of them even published their own periodicals.

The political domination over the press and the weakness of its commercial aspects constitute internal factors that account for the fact that the press until the past five years was not sufficiently developed in this country. Its political mission is an incentive to the publication of many newspapers and magazines.

In this connection it is worth noting an interesting phenomenon. As soon as the number of political parties was reduced, the
number of press publication should have decreased. But, on the contrary, there are more publications today than before 1966 when there were more political groupings in Indonesia.

From this phenomenon we can probably draw the conclusion that even though there has been a formal simplification of the political groupings, there remains in fact, a large number of political streams. It seems hazardous to draw such a conclusion, because it is possible for a group or individual to publish its or his own newspaper in spite of similarity in political streams to that of another group or individual. Similarity in political stream and orientation is not necessarily identical with similarity in interest.

The Indonesian Press benefits from its political commitment. Because of its political tradition, the Indonesian press has its basic commitment to the interest of the people. Particularly since 1958 the UNO has been very much interested in the role of the press in development. The Indonesian press has always adopted the basic attitude. It is merely a problem of changing its orientation from narrow political orientation to development orientation. When in 1966 the government took the initiative to change its political orientation to development orientation, the Indonesian press followed suit without being asked to do so. Of course, just a change in orientation is not enough. It must be accompanied by competence. This is the problem we are facing. The problem is not how to make the Indonesian press oriented to development, but how to give substance to a development-oriented press. This involves knowledge of development problems and technical or vocational ability to communicate them in stimulating writings.

The security officers of this country often describe their apparatus as follows: that the apparatus for the time being is to undergo an internal reordering, but at the same time it continues its function to secure public order and maintain security. A similar problem is also faced by the press.
While trying to direct its orientation towards development, at the same time it has to continue its function to provide information, to voice the aspirations of the people and to exercise control and make criticism. This paradox is not always easy to overcome.

2. Radio and television have similar characteristics. Strong commitment to idealism with the exception that both electronic media are managed and controlled by the government.

3. The position and role of the Indonesian press are influenced by the history of the country and political system prevailing in a certain period. Throughout those changes and development, the Indonesian press maintains its strong socio-political commitment and it has never during its long history of existence become a chronicle of trivialities like crime and sex nor a heralder of big happenings categorized as spot-news. What have been always carried out prominently are reports and analyses of events influencing the socio-political as well as economics-cultural aspects of the nation.

In general the Indonesia press could be classified into "serious", and almost none has fitted into the category of "yellow paper", eventhough such publication undeniably exist in the country, it could not be regarded as having a resemblance to those known in other countries.

4. Radio and Television (RRI and TVRI) fall under the jurisdiction of the government, but during the last decade the number of non-governmental radio stations is increasing. They are operating under regulations which stipulate the wave-length, organization and content of the programs.
Programs must stress education and information, adhere to the state's philosophy (the Pancasila), shall not be involved in political activities, and shall relay some RRI programs such as the news and other important events of the day.

Government regulation of private stations reflects the philosophy that mass media not only disseminate information and shape political opinions but can also act as an agent of social change and modernization. The radio is perceived as a mechanism for bridging the physical and psychological gap between town and country, strengthening social integration by spreading not only information but also common forms of entertainment. Of late there is a tendency of non-governmental radio stations becoming commercial by broadcasting advertisement, songs and producing plays.

The newspaper business in Indonesia, i.e. property and management are mostly in the hands of private enterprise. However, some government institutions are directly or indirectly involved in newspaper publications.

5. Since 1966, there is a Press Law which regulated the publishing of dailies as well as magazines and periodicals. The law stipulates ownership system, qualification of newsmen through their education and skill, formulation of the function of the press and its relations to the government and other social institutions. In addition, according to Press Law No. 11, 1966 and Regulation No. 19, 1970, a press advisory body exists to advice the Minister of Information on matters concerning the press and its future development. The membership consists of representatives of Journalists' Association, the Publishers Association, the Government and some experts in the field who at the same time acted as representatives of the society.
6. The circulation of daily newspapers is now around 2,000,000 with two-thirds of these belonging to the 122 daily newspapers scattered all over the country. The capital city of Jakarta absorbed 56 percent of the total national circulation. There are more than 2 million registered radios, and about 750,000 television sets. TVRI was on the air for the first time on 15th August, 1962, with a trial broadcast from the Fourth Asian Games taking place in Jakarta. The radio and television transmission capacity has undergone rapid development after the launching of PALAPA domestic satellite by the Indonesian Government in 1977, and practically the whole territory of the Republic can be reached by radio and television.

The growth of newspapers, especially those published in the capital of the provinces, the so-called regional newspapers underwent rapid development in these last five years. This was caused among other things by renovation of printing machines which automatically improved the quality of the paper and the increase in readership owing to the rise of purchasing power in the society. But, on national level and if compared to the UNESCO standards which mention as ideal the situation in which there is one newspaper for ten persons, with Indonesian’s current population there is only one newspaper for 154 persons. Thus the political messages or policy directives carried by the press at best influence considerably less than 10 percent of the total Indonesian population.

On the other hand radio is much more widely distributed among the common people than newspaper. The population tends to resist registering their radios, thus making it difficult to estimate the potential radio audience for the whole nation. The current estimates range from 2,5 to 5 million radio sets for the whole country, as it is
generally accepted that the number of radios is expanding rapidly in rural areas, because utilizing radio in the age of the transistor requires neither village electrification nor a high level of literacy.

7. As is the case with other developing countries, Indonesia is also faced by the simultaneous availability of all sorts of mass media mixture such as newspaper, radio, television, film and casette. This is a benefit for the developmental communication, which, if an appropriate selection of priorities could be made would certainly accelerate the progress of change.

Nearly 83 percent of the Indonesian population resides in the rural areas where traditional forms of communication remain much more important than the mass media. The ratio within the community is not to read, but to listen and to watch. Some forms of traditional communication media like "wayang", "ludruk", "wayang orang" are all audio visual and still deeply rooted in the village community. Therefore, modern communication media such as radio and in particular television are most suitable to the traditional habit of listening and watching to become a useful medium for spreading development information.

The problem still remains how to popularize radio and television in the rural community. These items might be within reach of a rich farmer, but they are still beyond the economic means of poor fishermen. What is more important is the selection of programs which conform to the taste and views of the rural community. Radio and television should become a familiar media with the villagers and a source of information, education as well as entertainment without the undesirable demonstrative effect of excessively consumptive patterns.
Therefore the selection of the programs is not an easy task as it involves budget and time needed for the production of "software". The price of a television set is still expensive and beyond reach of the average purchasing power of the Indonesian community. But this problem could be solved especially for the rural areas by installing television sets in strategic points where people can easily watch the programs like when they are collectively watching "wayang" performance.

8. According to my personal observation, which is not based on scientific study, the contents of radio programs are more efficient to cater for the need of the village community than television. Radio has variations in content of the programs ranging from agricultural extension program to public health, village community development as well as entertainment. The radio has already established different audiences as there are differences in listening habits. This fulfilment in mass media function could not yet reached by TVRI, because television broadcast started later in 1962, but it is catching up with radio during the past five years.

9. The Indonesian press is according to its traditional background strongly committed to national development, which was the main occupation during the past decades and the subsequent periods that followed. In the efforts to develop its own functions of development the Indonesian press, however, has still to face some basic problems, namely:

a. The necessity on the part of the press itself to develop and expand. The press is confronted with new development trend in the economic field which influences touch its very existence. Economic activity should be dealt with according
to economic laws. Planning of operation has to be calculated on the principle of cost accounting, the development of market mechanism, the increasing role of advertisement, management's efficiency etc., etc.

All of these factors exert certain influence on the part of the Indonesian press which obliged them to develop itself according to economic principles besides adhering to the idealistic side. Many newspapers have succeeded in adjusting to the new trend of development and made use of the opportunities offered by the new economic approach. But, many more have to solve problems emerging from the new economic system. Problems in management, efficiency, vulnerability towards new possibilities are problems confronting the Indonesian press nowadays.

b. At the same time the Indonesian press has also to develop its idealistic function as a development oriented mass media, which is not an easy task indeed, its commitment is still strong and orientation can quickly develop and expand, but there is the problem of how to transfer this commitment to development into day to day practice of journalism! The question is how to expand news with dimensions of development. Hitherto people including newspaper's readers get used to certain kind of news. Now the increase of rice production, illiteracy campaign, expanding the market of village handicrafts, increased production capacity of the farmers and small industries have to be in the news.
These kind of problems required reporters to be more resourceful in digging and presenting of the news in order to capture the readers' attention, to change reading habits, and to enlarge the interest of readers to matters relating to development. This involves knowledge of development problems and vocational ability to present them in stimulating writings.

10. Different political systems in developing countries. There are similar patterns in the political system among the developing countries, which generally adhere to a system which guarantees a strong and effective government.

In order to stimulate creative potentials, development has also to consider values as well as structural systems which are the existing relationship and their functions in society. Mass media, the press, can only contribute its valuable participation to national development if it makes its presence felt within the society, if it goes right into the field to collect datas, study and find the cause and relationship of arising problems. For the press to be able to execute its task properly it needs freedom apart from knowledge and skill. Again this is freedom which is functional in character.

Those two dimensions are sufficient to indicate that notwithstanding the existing limitation on freedom of the press there is still ample room for manœuvre in order to develop functional freedom, to gather and present facts, and problems pertaining to dimensions of development. Development itself is not an abstract thing, it has to be concretized.

11. It has to be acknowledged, however, that some times not only the press has not comprehend the possibilities of those dimensions, even the government and its apparatus more often than not have not...
come to grasp these necessities. Two-way communication, development which mobilized the potentials within the society are something implementations of which have to be developed extensively both by the press as well as the government.

12. The Indonesian press has performed its task fairly well to disseminate information from the government to society. This involves all activities of development particularly in the economic field. What is still lacking is probably informations from the society to the government through the press.

    Development concerns planning, program, implementation and result. The press usually carries report on one or some of those aspects only. It seldom present a comprehensive report. Notwithstanding its imperfectness the press has made its contribution to the cause of national development, by disseminating information, reporting the success and shortcoming, by presenting opinion and reaction prevailing in the society, thus functioning as "an early warning system".

13. In order to fulfill its function properly the press has to make a study of the society in which it is working and functioning. To understand the society not from its abstract meaning, but from its concrete entity. This knowledge can be derived from mixing with and having orientation to the society. The society's characteristics, its structure, heterogeneity.

    In a plural society comprising of different social, ethnical and religious groupings, the press is called for to function as a catalyst for unity and creative solidarity. It has to become a catalyst to bring about agreement from diversity of opinions and not in contrary to push differences into becoming a source of conflict and dissent. This has
become inherent with the attitude and strong commitment adopted by the Indonesian press. With this attitude the press has contributed to the growth of social solidarity and responsibility. The Indonesian press is trying to carry out this task with clear conscience.

14. To fulfill development functions the press is engaged in two kind of news presentations namely macro and micro reporting. Macro reporting is to introduce the national policy and program in the economic, social, politico-cultural fields and national resilience. This is the reference framework. Macro reporting is also backed up by micro reporting in which the press writes about a certain project or activity, to make an intensive study of the project and to find out which factors are conducive to its success and arouse further development. Also to try to discover arresting factors which caused the delay and threatened its successful implementation, to gather opinion, and the creative attitude as well as determination of the local community. The press should focus on profiles of development to the same extent as the write up it has done for celebrities of the show business.

15. Apart from the general function of the press, the mass media in developing countries has a special role to perform which covers the following:

a. The task to strengthen and stimulate the basic national consensus. This aspect is very important as developing countries are nations who are still cultivating their national integrity, which is the spiritual infrastructure of nation building.
b. The necessity to familiarize with sensitive social problems existing in the society. Problems which are not to be kept frozen, but also not just to be reported as such. The press has to find proper solution to existing problems by working together with the government and society.

c. To stimulate initiatives coming from the society in promoting its own creative potentials in accordance with its rising demands.

d. To disseminate and strengthen feelings of capability of the society to change its own destiny.

e. Shortcomings, failures, and corruption are reported by the press not in order to create feelings of despair and pessimism, but in order to stimulate self-correction and to inspire encouragement for progress, and therefore the willingness to be corrected and to impose self-correction.

16. In order to increase its ability to perform its function in development the press is still facing its own problems of how to obtain skilled personnel or how to increase the knowledge and sensitiveness of the staff it already possesses. These problems could be tackled by the press and the respective government of a certain country, but as this also concerns education and training the problems could also be brought into a regional forum for attention and probably to be solved multilaterally.