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Media, Ethnicity And National Unity (Indonesia)

By

Abdul Razak
ASEAN CONFERENCE ON MEDIA, ETHNICITY AND NATIONAL UNITY

Organized by ISMA-Indonesian and AMIC-Singapore.

Kuala Lumpur, December 1-3, 1988

Country Report - INDONESIA

RULES AND PRACTICES IN REPORTING SENSITIVE ISSUES

By ABDUL RAZAK

(1) Overview

JOURNALISTS in Indonesia balance their legally guaranteed rights to freedom and self-expression with responsibility in carrying out the role of the press as a social institution based on the national philosophy of Pancasila.

Balancing freedom and responsibility comes out of a process of avoiding the two perceived dangers: (a) abuse of freedom, and (b) abuse of the power of restraint.

Abuses may originate from the press and from those using the media for self-interests or group privileges 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.

This is prescribed in the Press Law (No.21/1982), that says the press “supports efforts at national building and be an active partner in national development, promotes and enhances social harmony, national unity, helps mould national identity, explains issues and policies to facilitate their implementation.”

In carrying out its role, the press “exercises self-restraint and good sense so as not to cause misunderstanding and tension between different ethnic, racial and religious groups.”

This portion of the Law was formulated on the assumption that the press could inflame or cool ethnic tensions in a country like Indonesia with her 170 million people diversified into approximately 500 ethnic and sub-culture groups which profess various religions and faiths, and speak 333 languages and dialects, with Bahasa Indonesia being the official language.

As a result of this stress on duties, it is not unusual for the media to find impediments to the full exercise of its freedom. Restrictions stem from self-restraints arising out of the imperatives to balance freedom and responsibility in promoting and preserving political stability, economic development, social justice and greater national cohesion towards attaining the national objectives and goals.

Even national security, unity, stability and harmony and so on, the media must make of the time have to be the first to give temporarily their freedom and concern. Reporting election results according to Indonesia’s national, political and cultural performance being full range of responsibility.
The purpose of this paper is to describe reasons for self-restraints and look at the statutory rules and regulations, code of ethics, certain restrictive provisions in the Penal Code, and the functions of two monitoring institutions, the Council of Ethics and the Press Council.

(2) Philosophical Basis

The rationales for why Indonesian journalists do what they do may be explained by the characteristic of the press system which is legally based on Pancasila. This system conforms with the country's cultural, political, economic aspirations, and historical background.

Every system, as in any tradition, has its own particular set of assumptions and arguments about man, the role of the State, the position of individual within the society and the way the media should function. Within the Indonesian context, an individual is a holistic man -- rational and emotional.

Pancasila, as prescribed in the State Constitution, obliges every individual, social organization, the State and Government to adhere to the national ideology as basic guiding principles, a primary source of law and rules, patterns of thinking, attitudes, behaviour and actions.

Likewise, the press also should follow the imperative of Pancasila to "think and act in accordance with the five principles -- 1) belief in the One and Supreme God, 2) a just and civilized humanity, 3) national unity (nationalism), 4) democracy led by the inner and practical wisdom of consensus arising out deliberations by and among representatives of the people, and 5) social justice for all the people in the country.

Pancasila is the state ideology, world outlook, national philosophy of life, the soul and personality (character), the primary source of law. It guides the people in achieving the common goal: a physically and spiritually prosperous society, in an independent, sovereign, united, peaceful, and unitary State. It provides the rules for balanced, harmonious relationships between individuals, with their fellows, with society, nature, with the Creator, and for the pursuit of progress and happiness. The keyword -- balanced -- refers to the perception of man as a holistic social human being capable of responding rationally, emotionally, and what not.

As one whole intact philosophy of life, Pancasila is operationalized as follows:

a) the first principle (belief in God) places Man as a creature of the Creator, provides freedom to profess a religion of one's choice. Mutual respect should prevail.

b) the second principle (humanity) implies respects for equality of human dignity, of rights and duties, and high regard for humanity.

c) the third principle (unity) calls for priority on unity, national interests and well-being above private, personal and group interests.
(3) Sensitive Areas

There are four very vital and sensitive sources of issues that have to be considered prudently by the publics and the press. There would be more to lose than gain when discussion or debate on any of the sensitive issues 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). Abbreviated by the first letters, these roots of social unrest are known as "SARA."

Reporters should be very cautious in writing about ethnic groups, religious, racial and inter-group disputes or issues. They should not call a "spade as a spade." Instead, reporters use lots of savvy and prudence, and swings through around-about way - (a higher level of abstraction) in describing or quoting facts and opinions about socially explosive and disintegrative issues. The authority would intervene to nip in the bud any tendencies that might flare up into chaos and political instability.

Self-restraints are justified by the inevitable risks of disrupting social harmony, national unity and stability -- indispensable preconditions to allowing people to concentrate on the most important tasks for them.

Unity is so crucial because stability and harmony are more than just prerequisites for the development of the country with 176.5 million people, mostly young generation. Indonesia has had enough instances of instability and disunity in the past.

(4) Methods of Criticism

Positive criticism has a greater probability of getting it accepted. On many instances, "how you say it" is more crucial than "what you say." Negative criticism is usually avoided.

Journalists may report public criticism containing well-reasoned arguments as part of its social control function. But to be effective, criticisms should be couched in the language of diplomats -- saying one thing with a subtle allusion to mean another thing -- and be expressed in a manner that does not embarrass or place anyone or institution criticised on a spotlight of public shame.

Social control, which is guaranteed by the Press Law, should be conducted in a constructive manner -- through identifying problems and possible causal backgrounds, suggesting alternative solutions by comparing advantages and disadvantages of each proposed way-out, and showing the likely outcome or gain.
According to an Indonesian sociologist, public criticism should be presented like "jamu" (herbal medicine). It is bitter but helpful for preserving health. Dilute the bitter tastes by mixing "jamu" with sugar, and thereby establish a technique of "sugar-coating" in critiques to make the pills look more attractive, digestible, and palatable.

Criticism should be addressed to problems related to policies and implementation, and should not be pinpointed directly or openly to persons or individuals who are, in fact, responsible for the matters. Despite the facts, it is generally understood that power or public authority must "open her heart, soul and conscience" to social control. Otherwise, it would tend to digress eventually from the "rail."

(5) Code of Ethics

The press has to abide by the self-imposed Code of Ethics of the Indonesian Journalists' Association. Enforcement rests mainly on the journalist's professional conscience. Sanctions on violations is the prerogative of the Association. Despite its self-binding nature, the public and authority may reprimand the press for failure to adhere to the Code of Ethics.

The 6-point Code of Ethics is based on Pancasila. Basically the code says Indonesian Journalists should be self-guided by the principles in Pancasila.

Journalists "shall consider with full sense of responsibility and prudence the desirability or appropriateness of certain news, articles, photographs, cartoons and other such matters to be published in the media."

The press "shall not publish any item that may be destructive and detrimental to the Nation and State, or item that may incite social disorder, or item that may be construed offensive to the moral standards, religion, belief or faith of a person or group 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 III on "Methods of Reporting News and Expressing Opinions," says that news reports or articles must not carry "erroneous accusation, rumor, sedition that may endanger the safety of the Nation and State." Reports must also 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 the news, making sure to their best knowledge and ability, not to distort the truth through exaggeration or through wrong 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 effectively destroy the reputation or honor, or violating a person's privacy.

Any person aggrieved by inaccurate or biased press reports shall be given the Right of Reply as a preventive measure. The reply must be inserted on the same page, occupying 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.

(6) Advertising Code

The Indonesian Advertising Agencies' Association also has its own Code of Ethics and Practices. It says that "advertisement should not offend, degrade or ridicule any religious faiths, moral ethics, traditions, cultures, racial or interest groups." Advertisements shall not contain tendentious incitement that may have the effect of antagonizing racial, sub-cultural, or ethnic groups in Indonesia.

(7) Penal Code

Provisions in the Penal Code (Kitab Undang-undang Hukum Pidana, or KUHP) also affect the Press. Several articles are sorted out herewith to give references:

Article 154 KUHP: "Any person shall be liable to imprisonment not exceeding seven years or a maximum fine of Rp 4500 on conviction for publicly uttering feelings of hostility, hatred or insult against the Government." (The heavy burden of proof rests on the offender and not on the Court. An offense is punishable as long as the act was committed in public, irrespective of whether or not the act has impact on public.)

Article 155 KUHP: "Any person shall be liable to a maximum of four years and six months imprisonment or a fine of Rp 4500 on conviction of publishing, exhibiting or posting written or printed materials or pictures containing sedition or giving reasonable cause to believe that the act was designed to incite feelings of hostility, hatred or insult against the Government of Indonesia."

Article 156 KUHP: "Any person shall be liable to a maximum four-year imprisonment and a fine of Rp 4500 on conviction for uttering in public feelings of hostility, hatred or contempt against any or several groups (ethnical) in Indonesia." ("Groups" include all constituents in Indonesia which are differentiated by races, religions, birthplaces, hereditary, nationalities or status of their origins.)
Article 156a KUHP: "Any person convicted for publishing, exhibiting or posting written or printed materials or pictures containing seditious intentions to incite feelings of hostility, hatred or insult against any groups among the Indonesian people with a deliberate intention to make the materials known to public, shall be liable on conviction to a maximum imprisonment of two years and six months or to a fine not exceeding Rp 4500."

Article 160 KUHP: "Any person may be punished to a maximum of six years in prison or to a fine of Rp 4500 on conviction for publicly inciting -- by words of mouths or in writing -- other person to commit an offense, or violent resistance to public authority, rules and regulations of the country.

The Council of Ethics

The Council of Ethics, known as "Dewan Kehormatan PWI Pusat", is an autonomous body within the Indonesian Journalists' Association (PWI). It has seven members, comprising senior editors, lawyers, political science and communication scholars, who are elected in PWI national Congress for a five-year term, co-terminous with the term of PWI Central Executive Board.

The council is empowered by the Congress to monitor and scrutinize published stories that violate the Code of Ethics and examine complaints by readers about unfair, inaccurate or insensitive press reports.

The Council may recommend sanctions against violators through the PWI Board. Sanctions correspond to the magnitude and seriousness of the offense. Corrective "penalty" may be in the form of a written warning or reprimand calling the editor or reporter to print rectification to a story.

If an editor refuses to comply, the council suggests 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.

Under the regulation (Menpen No.47/1975), the Indonesian Journalists' Association is the sole, legalized professional organization. Membership is compulsory for all journalists.

Membership suspension is a serious penalty. On various occasions, the PWI Central Executive Board, on its own initiative or together with the Press Council and the Indonesian Publishers' Association have issued statements calling on government and private institutions to deny access to information sources to anyone claiming to be a reporter but fails to show necessary accreditation cards. A working journalist must carry a Press Card signed personally by his chief editor and a valid PWI membership card.

During 1983-88, the Council received from public/readers 645 written complaints, an average of ten "angry persons" every month.
Half of the complaints sought redress for inaccurate or biased reports. In its latest press release (Oct. 31, 1988) the Council says, the media in big cities tend to increasingly ignore the Code of Ethics as a result of competitive scramble to win readers and advertisers.

The Council sent 47 signed reminders to the 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.

(9) The Press Council

The Press Council was established as a non-structural institution -- non-governmental -- to serve as a policy-making forum on print media-related matters. The Council assists the Government, particularly the Ministry of Information, in promoting the development and interest of the national press. Its 25 members, which include five government officials, represent the organizations of journalists, publishers, graphics and printing, media advertising agencies, scholars, education experts. The members can be reelected for a second term.

The council, as stipulated in a Presidential Decree/Decision (No.1/1984), does the following principal functions:

(a) assists the Minister of Information in drafting law and regulations concerning the press.

(b) establishes and promotes a mechanism of positive and interactive working relationships and deliberations between the three components of the press system -- the Government, the Press and the Society -- on matters of public and media interest, implementation of responsible freedom based on the principles of Pancasila.

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

(d) provides advice in efforts to promote a free and responsible press.

(10) Mechanism of Positive Interaction

Indonesia subscribes neither to the notion of the press as "the fourth branch" institution nor to the "adversary role" towards the other two components -- the Government and the Society -- in the political system.

Instead, the system seeks to establish parallel partnership, cooperative and open functional relationships, to develop mutual trust and assistance, duties and accountability to the public. And this is done through a mechanism of positive interactions between the Press, the Government and the Society.

The pattern of interactive communication in the "tripartite" model is multiple -- vertical (top-down and bottom-up) and horizontal (among and between social institutions or groups).
Communication and dialogues are organized periodically to eliminate dissonances arising from differences in perception of the respective status, role, rights and duties, freedom and responsibility of the participating “actors” in the political system.

In any State, the government is constitutionally authorized and empowered to administer public affairs, deliver common good, put out rules and regulations. The administration occupies a central, dominant position and role. As such, its policies and actions affect the entire society. For this reason, the government is accountable to the public.

Within the Indonesian democratic system, the government is the political “supra-structure,” made up of the three branches — the Executive, the Legislative and the Judiciary. The press and social institutions are the “infra-structure.” In practice, the press acts as an intermediary.

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.

In this context, the press (as an intermediary) is expected primarily to inform and give people simple, clear “guides” to reasonable actions. The media provide information that enable public to gain adequate understanding of policies, including their own preferences to participate effectively in the political process.

The government is a major source of information on public affairs. Media need the information as much as the government depends on the press to convey messages. Experiences proved that getting messages across the nation through the press is much faster than through the bureaucratic network.

The same is equally true in obtaining feedback from the society. When the press reports actual situations in the field, it is meant to provide feedback and social control, or “an early warning” to problems that might bring serious implications if left unattended on time.

From here it is obvious that both the Press and Government are engaged in functional relationships. But these relationships are founded on the basis of cooperation, mutual trust, and not on antagonistic attitude, unless the government or certain individuals in authority are publicly known to have digressed from the rules.

On the other hand, the Society needs both the Press and the Government. The Press expects people in society to freely and responsibly express their opinions and thoughts on how problems affecting them be solved. They have the rights to do so and the press articulate them.
The imperative is that the society, and the government should be open and accessible for information, opinion of public interest. Honesty is required to develop a tripartite communication and dialogue. Relevant information must be traded off openly among and between the "actors," provided that the release of such information would not endanger national security.

That is how an interactive and positive communication is carried out in Indonesia to come to a common ground in treating nationally important problems, issues and public affairs.

(11) Case: Lard Shortening Issues

Factually inaccurate rumors spread like wildfire if the general public is not appropriately and timely informed of truthful and credible explanations shortly after the news break. A case in review here is about the controversial issues of "lard shortening in manufactured food products" which shocked the consumers nationwide and angered the entire government.

The impact of the report brought drastic sales drop of the allegedly "haram" products, causing big losses and eroding the credibility of the producers.

The attorney general was instructed to track down the responsible persons who spread the inaccurate reports. The minister of information warned the editors of three daily newspapers in Jakarta and Surabaya known to have run the stories without first checking the accuracy.

The issues originated from a random survey report by a food scientist at one of the universities in the country. The Report shortlisted 34 items of manufactured food products randomly picked up in the market. The studies found evidence that the products might probably contain "lard shortening" (pork fat) which is "haram" (taboo) for Moslems. When the "purity" of a product is doubtful, Moslem must avoid consuming it until it is verified. It is "subhat" (between "haram" and "halal", permissible or taboo).

The report was published in a campus publication in February 1938. Another bulletin from another campus reprinted the story intact. However, in the ensuing months, a yet unknown third party extended the list of products to 63 items and disseminated the photocopied story to the public.

Finally, after a lapse of eight months, the story got into the news desks of three daily newspapers. The item was published in October, shocking people who have been consuming the products identified in the press report.

An endless public complaints was aired, calling the government to act on the producers. Sales of industrially processed food products which are doubted by consumers dropped sharply.

The government reacted angrily in public statements, declaring the issue as subversive crime, allegedly intended to destroy the national industries. Official agents were still working on it to apprehend the wrongdoers.
The editors of three newspapers, the scientist who did the survey, and other persons were summoned for questioning by authorities.

In an after-thought analysis, one would argue that:

1. The issues would not have caused such serious implications if the staff editor had made every effort in the first place to check and recheck the truth of the story and find out whether the source is credible and authoritative. Until after the truth of the facts is verified and established, an editor should not take the risk in reporting socially sensitive subject.

2. Authorities made frequent public statements with "deterrent" effects to discourage people (consumers) from further aggravating the issues which later became politically disruptive.

On the other hand, public statements should be cautiously worded without repeating the key words in the issues, or else repetition by public authorities would eventually cause the effect of reconfirming the issues in the public minds. Repetition would enliven the issues and even reinforce the doubts about the products or negate efforts by the producers and advertisers to regain people's trust.

3. From a communication strategy, any statements designed to clarify truth and rebuttals must be formulated and reported in such a way that leave no glaring gaps that would be filled by readers through the mental process of "symbolic interactions."

Mass media should refrain from reporting information without properly checking the truth, especially on sensitive matters related to religion. Newswriters assigned to handle the story should be sensitized to the "danger" of overplaying the story.

(12) Recommendations/Suggestions:

Professional Guidelines for Reporting Ethnic Affairs

Basic Ideas (Preamble)

Mass media exist to facilitate people in the exercise of their rights and needs to communicate -- a very basic requirement for human-being to live, survive and grow to fullest potential in a society.

In a broader context, media assist people to obtain adequate understanding of their environment -- understanding of what fellow society members do for themselves, what the government undertakes in behalf of the people, and for the people -- so that each individual or group in a society could do for itself the position what is necessary and good for himself and the community.
A society is made up of diverse individuals playing various social roles. In light of this, it is understood that different people tend to see and respond differently to challenges, problems and duties facing them in a society.

Their way or mode of reacting may be influenced by their needs, interests, perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, cultural and ethnical preferences. Reactions and responses may be rational and/or emotional, constructive or destructive, and/or between the two extremes depending on situational exigencies.

Of the many aspects related to human tendencies, there are certain areas or matters which may cause conflicting or antagonistic reactions, which, therefore, demand careful considerations.

In Asean countries, sources of sensitive issues concern races, religious faiths and ethnical origins. Conflicts arising out of these subjects would tend to disrupt harmonious social relationships, social order and unity. For a society to grow and progress, it is necessary to maintain its stability and harmony.

For journalists to contribute their part to preserving peace, social harmony in a society, they shall give due regard to the proposed guidelines:

(1) Journalist shall not write reports, opinion or comments which would lead to confrontative atmosphere between different racial, ethnical and religious groups that make up the fabric of society. Journalist shall strive at all times, instead, to promote harmony, mutual respect, tolerance, deference and unity among them.

(2) Journalist shall refrain from reporting information without properly checking 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) Journalist shall honestly report and interpret the news, making sure to the best of his/her knowledge and ability, not to suppress essential facts or distort the truth through exaggeration or through wrong or improper emphasis that might incite social unrest or feelings of hatred and restlessness.

(4) Knowing that public could react nationally or emotionally to issues affecting them, journalist shall pay due regard to the multi-ethnic, cultural, and religious fabric of the society.

(5) Journalist shall resort to fair, open, and honest means or efforts to obtain information, photographs or documents necessary to enable him/her to carry out his/her professional work, properly identifying himself/herself and purpose of the research as a representative of media.

(6) Journalist may report public criticism and fair comments on all institutions in a manner that would contribute to fuller understanding of the subjects or part of social freedom and responsibility.
In preserving social harmony in a multi-racial society, public figures and authorities shall also refrain from releasing statements, formulated in such a manner, that might be misconstrued differently or incorrectly by the public. Inaccurate press reports may originate from the press as well as from public officials who give information.

Public authorities are called to provide adequate access to information to the press on matters of public interest so as to enable journalists to report correctly and responsibly, and avoid creating misunderstanding or misrepresentation of facts.

A free, responsible and credible press could be promoted best through a mechanism of positive and interactive cooperation between the Press, the Society and the Government in an atmosphere of mutual trust and good faith.

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.

In this light, journalists shall act in good faith as an intermediary and facilitator of public discussions on matters of national interests.

At all times, journalists shall make every necessary efforts to bring social conflicts from the plane of violence to the platform of reasonable discussion.

Jakarta, 23 November 1988

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Brief biodata:
CODE OF ETHICS FOR ASEAN JOURNALISTS

Preamble

The Confederation of ASEAN Journalists, aware of the responsibility of journalists to the public in each country of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, with a view to achieving peace and progress in the region, hereby promulgates this Code of Ethics for ASEAN Journalists.

1. The ASEAN journalist shall resort only to fair, open and honest means or effort to obtain news, photographs, or documents necessary to enable him/her to carry out his/her professional work, properly identifying himself/herself in the process as being a representative from media.

2. The ASEAN journalist shall not allow personal motives or interest to influence him/her or to colour his/her views in a manner that would reflect on his/her professional integrity or would undermine the dignity of his/her profession.

3. The ASEAN journalist shall not demand, or accept any payment, gift or any other consideration by way of recompense for reporting what is not true or for withholding or suppressing the truth.

4. The ASEAN journalist shall honestly report and interpret the news, making sure, to the best of his/her knowledge and ability, not to suppress essential facts or distort the truth through exaggeration or through wrong or improper emphasis.

5. The ASEAN journalist shall give any person aggrieved by his/her report or interpretation of the news the right of reply.

6. The ASEAN journalist shall not violate confidential information or material obtained by him/her in the exercise of his/her calling.

7. The ASEAN journalist shall not identify his/her source, and shall resist any outside attempt to make him/her do so, when so specifically enjoined by his/her informant.
8. The ASEAN Journalist shall refrain from writing reports which have the effect of destroying the honour or reputation of a private person unless public interest justifies it.

9. The ASEAN journalist shall pay due regard to the multi-ethnic, cultural, and religious fabric of ASEAN countries.

10. The ASEAN journalist shall not write reports, opinions or comments which would endanger the security of his/her country, or foment armed confrontation between his/her country and any other ASEAN country, striving at all times, instead, to promote closer friendly relations among them.

Done in Manila on the 25th of November, Nineteen Eighty Seven, during the Seventh CAJ General Assembly.

COMMITTEE ON ASEAN JOURNALISTS' CODE OF ETHICS.

1. Luis R. Mauricio  
   (National Press Club of the Philippines)
2. Djia'far H. Assegaff  
   (Indonesian Journalists' Association)
3. Abdul Razak  
   (Indonesian Journalists' Association)
4. Ivan Lim  
   (Singapore National Union of Journalists)
5. Goh Kay Chong  
   (National Union of Journalists Malaysia)
6. Manich Sooksomchitra  
   (Confederation of Thai Journalists).

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CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES AND SENSITIVITIES

If the proposed guidelines are to be operative on an Asean-wide scale, the differences in cultural perspective and typical sensitivities in Asean countries should be given due respect. These excerpts were abstracted from a four-article series by a Thai scholar, Dr. Amaret Sila-on, in The Nation Review (Bangkok, August 5 and 6, 1981 editions). Unfortunately, the first and last part of the series were missing.

Identified common cultural traits in Asean countries are:

1) A common tendency to consider almost every activity in the light of religion. Religion is not just a single aspect of life for most people in Asean.

2) Highest priority is accorded to getting along with others by showing mutual respect, behaving deferentially towards others.

3) A tendency to communicate without embarrassing others or causing someone to lose face, to use gentle persuasion in order to influence people.

4) A tendency to avoid conflict, and instead, show moderation and tolerance in dealing with others. People tend to avoid being inconsiderate. Tend to be highly considerate and respectful of others, and avoid embarrassing others or causing them inconveniences.

5) Tend to favor symbolism.

The Philippines (Population: 63.6 million):

The people speak 400 different dialects in addition to English with Spanish accents. Catholic (90%) is a unifying factor. A large Muslim population (5%) lives in the South. The country is made up of 7,107 islands.

Voices are not raised too often except to sing and to laugh. The people generally seek harmony in the conduct of business and other affairs. They make great efforts to maintain social smoothness by going along with the crowd. "Giving in" and "making concessions" are known in Tagalog as "pakikisima." They will try not to embarrass, and instead, give signal -- telling indirectly through euphemisms -- designed to save a counterpart's face whose ideas are thought unacceptable.

Cooperation rather than competition is the operative word. Thus, it's common to ask one's boss to be a godfather to a newborn child as one form of exchange of obligations and favours.
Singapore (Pop. 2.6 million):

The population is mainly of Chinese descent (76.5%). People in the multiracial society speak four languages, English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. Religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Christian, Islam, Confucianism.

Their approach to business is pragmatic and effective. The private sector is given conducive atmosphere to unleash all talents.

"Face" is very important. The idea has two meanings. The first involves a person's moral character and the desire to be well thought of by others. The second pertains to the social prestige that comes from success in business.

Not much time is "wasted" in beating around the bush and sipping tea outside the office.

As long as you don't cause a person to lose face, he won't mind if you step on his toes a bit.

Thailand (Pop. 55.0 million):

The population is fairly homogenous and predominantly Buddhist with Thai being the official language. Various dialects are also spoken in different parts of the country. There is a sizable Muslim (9.05%) presence in the South.

His Majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej is a unifying national figure and is highly revered by the people.

Thais are known for their moderation and tolerance. However, relationships may change over time from warm to cool and to frigid inspite of their tendencies to refrain from crossing words with a business associate.

Several typical social values are prevailing. The "krengjai" concept means "self-effacing, respectful, humble and highly considerate of others." It means that one avoids embarrassing others or causing them inconveniences. This trait leads to low-keyed type of behaviour in business because it means "avoiding any hint of conflict or serious differences of opinions." This mode of behavior is more intensified as one goes up the social strata.

Thais do not like being serious for long periods of time. They enjoy life and have coined a special word for this attitude: "sanuk." It involves the feelings of fun, happiness, contentment and lack of stress.

If you come to Thailand for business, expect a bit of fun as well. Thais love to eat. Guests will be taken out to lunch or dinner or whatever. Business will be conducted in such a friendly atmosphere.

Malaysia (Pop. 16.36 million):

The major ethnic groups include Malays (53%), Chinese (36%) and Indians, Pakistanis, Sri Lanka (11%).

There are also groups of Malays whose foreparents came from Indonesia's Minangkabau (West Sumatra), Java, Sulawesi, Mandailing (South Tapanuli in North Sumatra).

Indonesia and Malaysia may be considered together as they share many cultural traits, the most important of which is their common religion of Islam.
Here religion is considered not just a single aspect of life. Islamic businessmen from Indonesia and Malaysia consider almost every activity in the light of their religion.

The highest priority is accorded to getting along with others. Social behavior is largely concerned with showing mutual respect and behaving deferentially towards other persons.

Knowing where one stands in the social hierarchy and behaving accordingly is very important in the conduct of business. Aristocratic titles (Syed and Tunku) are in use.

Professionals are given separate titles so that almost everyone will have some idea of where others belong in the social hierarchy.

People above Encik (Mr), Puan (Mrs.) and Uk (Miss) are referred to as Dato, Dato Sri, Tan Sri or Tun.

In Malaysia and Indonesia, the social system reflects the time when most people lived in typical little villages, called "kampong" that scattered throughout both countries. Cooperation, called "gotong royong" (mutual help) in this kind of setting was essential for fishing, planting, irrigating and harvesting crops.

People learned to accept the authority of the headman rather than insisting upon "doing their own things." They learned to give way, to know their place, to defer to others and to use gentle persuasion in persuading others. Thus, a slight raising of one's voice could be construed to mean a violent display of temper in another culture.

Indonesia (Pop. 176.5 million)

The country is made of 13,667 islands. It is wider from East to West (5,152 kms) than from North to South (1,770 kms).

The people speak one official language, but as many as 365 dialects. (Other estimate put the figure at 583 dialects spoken by approximately 300 ethnic groups).

The people are predominantly Moslem (88.1%). The rest are Catholics (2.9%), Protestants (5.8%), Hindus (2%), Buddhists (0.9%). (Source: Asean Selayang Pandang, Jakarta: Setnas, Foreign Ministry, 1987.)

Different ethnic groups in the country make the people fairly heterogeneous despite their common Malay heritage.

A slight raising of one's voice could be taken as a violent reactive temper in Javanese subcultures. However, the same high pitched voice may be considered normal in some parts of Sumatra.

People on coastal planes are used to louder speaking lest their voice may be inaudible because of strong winds and wave splashes.

Perception of power and authority is inspired by the cosmical concept. Power is thought of as "indivisible" and "heavenly ordained." The total "mass" of power is constant. Power only changes in form, like ice changes into water. The notion of singularity in power source ("asas tunggal") provides culturally perceived justification for centralized power concentration in the hands of the top person in an organization.

Within this notion, others who are delegated with power must be self-serviant to the "giver" of power and favors, which establish patron-client relationships.