

THE MEDIA IN A SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

A CASE STUDY OF INDONESIA

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Abstract

The Indonesian media is today at a critical moment in its history. Four years after it was liberalised, issues and debates have surfaced today that will affect its long-term viability as a free press. It is time to take stock of the changes that have occurred and address the issues before it goes on an irreversible path. Like other institutions in Indonesia, the media sector is undergoing reform. The media's transformation has taken place against the backdrop of political and economic transition in Indonesia following the tumultuous events that began with the monetary crisis of late 1997, climaxing with the resignation of President Soeharto in May 1998. Since then, the media has redefined its relationship with the state and society. It has contributed to the transition and consolidation of democracy in Indonesia. How has the media in Indonesia changed? What impact does it have on Indonesia's political development and policy-making? Will the advent of the Internet as a new media bring about more democracy and development? What are the prospects for the Internet media in Indonesia? What are the issues facing the Indonesian media today? Has the free press brought about greater democracy and development in Indonesia? What lessons can be learned from the media's development in Indonesia that may have implications for other societies in transition?

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

1 Conventional models of press-politics relations place importance on the unbridled free press and free access to information as essential to democracy. Access to information ensures that citizens make informed choices, and information serves as a checking function on the elected representatives¹ The media is the megaphone that informs people about what is happening and helps them formulate their viewpoints². The media are the “connective tissue of democracy”, the principal means through which citizens and their elected representatives communicate to inform and influence³. In democratic societies, the media serve to hold the elite accountable and ensure popular control of the government⁴. As such, the conventional Western model of free press is often taken as the template for transitional societies to emulate.

2 However, societies differ and the issues faced in their own media’s development are varied and unique to themselves. Countries are also different in terms of their political, historical, social, economic and cultural contexts. These need to be factored in. Moreover, the direct association of democracy with a free press is never simple. Democracy does not necessarily bring about genuine free press, and vice versa. Several authors have questioned the link between free press and democracy. McChesney’s *Rich Media, Poor Democracy – Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (1999) examines the media crisis in the US,

¹ Center for Democracy and Governance, *The Role of Media in Democracy: A Strategic Approach*, Washington DC: USAID, 1999, p 3.

² Carla Brooks Johnston, *Global New Access – The Impact of New Communications Technologies*, Westport: Praeger, 1998, p 21.

³ Anthony Mughan and Richard Gunther, “The media in democratic and nondemocratic regimes: a multilevel perspective”, in Richard Gunther and Anthony Mughan (eds), *Democracy and the Media*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p1.

that is, the contradiction between a profit-driven mass media and the communication requirements of a democratic society, and the need to reform the media system structurally. Mughan and Gunther's *Democracy and the Media* (2000) is a compilation of case studies of ten countries at different stages in their democratic evolution that challenge the traditionally-held view of the uniformly positive contribution to democracy by a free, unregulated media. Some journalists in newly democratised societies have been charged with undermining democracy rather than reinforcing it - there is a growing disillusionment over the extent to which the press presents an "unbiased flow of a plurality of viewpoints or even an adequate volume of the kinds of information that democratic theory implies should be available to voters"; and even evidence of disillusionment with democracy itself as irresponsible coverage of politics has encouraged public cynicism⁵. The consequences are low levels of political knowledge, withdrawal from involvement with politics, and avoidance of political news altogether⁶. There are many macro (political culture, regulatory practices structure of society etc) and micro (levels of education, attitudes etc) -level variables that interact differently in different countries to shape the nature of the media effect on politics⁷.

3 How the media functions in its role as the "connective tissue" linking the elected government with its citizens can affect the quality of democracy⁸ The mass media that is supportive of democracy is one that is independent, financially viable, has diverse and

⁴ Ibid, p 4.

⁵ Ibid, p7.

⁶ Ibid, p26.

⁷ Richard Gunther and Anthony Mughan, "The political impact of the media: a reassessment" in Richard Gunther and Anthony Mughan (eds), *Democracy and the Media*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p 403.

⁸ Ibid, p 420.

plural voices and serves the public interest⁹. Gunther and Mughan's (2000) normative standards for assessing the performance of the media are impartiality (media pluralism and non-partisan news coverage), and the volume of policy-relevant information they disseminate to voters. Their study shows a trend towards dilution of the substantive informational content of political communications disseminated by the media, and increasingly rancorous relationship between journalists and politicians. Both trends can be detrimental to the quality of democracy as they affect the effective role the media could play in informing citizens and empowering them to hold their governments accountable¹⁰.

4 A variable identified by Gunther and Mughan is the set of norms that constrains the behaviour of journalists, particularly the extent to which a "public service ethic" is pervasive within the journalistic subculture. The presence or absence of a public service ethic influences how journalists perform their role in presenting unbiased and adequate amount of policy-relevant information to the public. The key emphasis in the role of the media in democracy is the set of journalistic ethics and norms, and press responsibility in reporting.

Case study of Indonesia

5 Many studies have been made the media in transition societies since the trend of democratisation around the world from the late 1980s. Elizabeth Fox (ed)'s *Media and Politics in Latin America* (1988) looks at the political and economic actors, the changing alliances and agreements and the debates and policies that forged the modern media, especially the broadcast media, in Chile, Peru, Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador, Argentina,

⁹ Center for Democracy and Governance, p 3.

¹⁰ Gunther and Mughan, p 432.

Brazil, Uruguay and Bolivia. Goran Hyden et al (eds)'s *Media and Democracy in Africa* (2002) provides an assessment of the role that the media play in democratisation in sub-Saharan Africa. Peter Gross' *Mass Media in Revolution and National Development – The Romanian Laboratory* (1996) looks specifically at the case study of Romania in transition and draws lessons learned from the “experiment”. Stjepan Malovic and Gary W. Selnow (2001)'s book *The People, Press, and Politics of Croatia* examines the media in another Eastern European country in transition.

6 Todate, there has been no comprehensive study of the Indonesian media, including the print, electronic and Internet media, since the end of the Soeharto regime in 1998. Past studies were about the Indonesian media before the transition. However, a few authors have documented the development of the Indonesian media in the post-Soeharto period. Philip Kitley's article (2001) examines the current press freedom in the context of the history of bans and repression of the media in Indonesia, and assesses the future developments in the Indonesian media. He argues that the repressive action of the Soeharto regime against the media have, ironically, prepared the Indonesian readership and media people for a “new and different alignment of power relations that are likely to be increasingly supportive of civil society”¹¹. Damien Kingsbury's chapter in his book¹² on Indonesian politics examines the media under and after Soeharto and concludes that the Indonesian media were only one among many influences on political development in Indonesia. None has taken a comprehensive look at the issues faced by the media today, including the Internet media, nor offered policy solutions for its future development. This paper tries to fill this void by evaluating the issue from a policy perspective.

¹¹ Philip Kitley, “After the bans: Modelling Indonesian communications for the future”, in Grayson Lloyd and Shannon Smith (eds), *Indonesia Today – Challenges of History*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001, pg 256.

7 The Indonesian experience makes an interesting subject for a case study of the media's role in society, and its effect on politics. It provides an illustration of how the free press could influence the political development in a country. This case study illuminates the issues faced by a newly freed press in a transitional society. This will have important implications for the government, members of the media sector and the foreign donor community, which are involved in helping Indonesia's transition and reform efforts. Even as the Indonesian press has gained its freedom, does it enjoy real freedom? The press has to ponder over how to combine its new freedom with responsibility. It is at this crucial juncture when an evaluation of the media's development could help shape its future course.

8 Indonesia provides a complex case study in media development not only because it is a country in democratic transition, but it is also in the midst of profound economic and social changes. It is still reeling from the aftermath of the 1997 economic crisis, and still confronts serious political and social challenges that threaten the unity and integrity of the nation. The media sector is only one among many in the country that is undergoing a whole range of reforms, including in the political, economic, legal, institutional, and socio-cultural realms. Its large size spread over 17,000 islands stretching 4,000 miles, and population of over 210 million, high level of poverty (27.1 % of the population live below the national poverty line, gross national income (GNI) per capita is only \$680), and illiteracy rate of 12%¹³, present serious challenges to turning the citizenry into an educated electorate through the mass media.

¹² Damien Kingsbury, *The Politics of Indonesia* (2nd ed.), Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002.

¹³ The World Bank official website, at <http://www.worldbank.org>.

9 This study was inspired by my own experience in Indonesia during the tumultuous transition when I was based in the Singapore Embassy in Jakarta from September 1997 to April 2001. I had the opportunity to interact and develop close personal and working relationships with many in the media and media-related sectors. These include the chief editors of the country's largest and most important newspaper to local stringers who work for foreign newspapers; the news producers of television and radio stations to broadcast journalists and news anchors; academics in communications studies to NGO workers involved in media and press development projects; press officers from other foreign embassies to foreign correspondents based in Jakarta; and members of parliament to government officials. All share a common concern for the future development of the Indonesian press. This paper is the result of the varied views and opinions expressed in my discussions with these contacts. These are supplemented by email discussions with some of them for the latest update on recent trends and developments.

10 The paradox of the contemporary political communications media is that they helped to end authoritarian regimes by fostering political pluralism, thereby helping spread democracy, but within established democracies like the US, they have failed to live up to their potential to improve the quality of democracy¹⁴. The Indonesian media should be wary of following the path of other democracies and avoid this paradox. It is time now to evaluate the media's experience in the past few years and correct the failures before they become detrimental to the freedom of the press and democracy. It is hoped that this case study of the Indonesian media would draw attention to the shortcomings of the media's development and reform since 1999. Policy-makers, journalists, Western aid donors, and media observers could reflect on the progress and failures made in the past four years since

press freedom was gained in Indonesia. They could draw lessons from this to formulate and develop regulatory frameworks and journalistic ethics and norms to guide the future development of the media that would be supportive of the efforts to consolidate and stabilise the political system and economy, and help build a new Indonesia.

Paper outline

11 This paper offers a panoramic view of the reciprocal relationship between the media and politics, the politics of democracy and democratisation, the media effects of these relationship and issues and debates in the development of the press in a democratising society. Chapter II first gives a background to the media landscape in Indonesia and its recent history. In order to understand the psyche and current state of journalism and the press in Indonesia, one needs to understand its recent past as well as appreciate the political, economic and socio-cultural contexts in which the mass media is situated in today. In Chapter III, the media's role in and impact on politics are illustrated with recent case examples. It is shown that while political development has freed the press from the state's control, the press now plays an influential part in shaping and affecting politics in Indonesia. This role and impact of the media extend from domestic politics to foreign policy and Indonesia's relations with its neighbours. Looking ahead to the future, the role and impact of the new digital media, the Internet, will be evaluated in Chapter IV. Chapter V examines current issues facing the press in Indonesia today. Conventional wisdom places the freedom of the press as a key requirement for true democracy, thus this study will evaluate the Indonesian case to see if there is indeed a free press in the country, and if so, whether it contributes to democratic development. This paper concludes with the lessons learned from the Indonesian experience that may have implications for other

¹⁴ Gunther and Mughan, 2000, p 444.

societies undergoing transition. It contends that in the absence of a genuinely independent and responsible media, and a democratically mature and educated society with wide access to the media, a free press may not function properly in serving a society in democratic transition.

Chapter II

INDONESIA'S MEDIA LANDSCAPE

1 The Indonesian media environment is a thriving one. Jakarta, the capital, is the media hub of Indonesia and hosts about half of all media publications, and all 10 TV stations in the country¹⁵. Many regional, provincial and metropolitan newspapers are controlled by Jakarta-based media empires. The secondary media hub is Surabaya, Indonesia's second-largest city, which is fast becoming the media centre for the eastern Indonesia region, and challenging the capital's domination of the media industry¹⁶.

2 The public source of information, particularly political news and information, is mainly from the electronic broadcast media. As media of mass communication, both radio and television are very far reaching compared to the print media. Radio has a 90 percent reach, and television roughly between 60 and 70 percent¹⁷. The newspaper readership level is relatively low at 15 million for a population of more than 210 million or about 1 newspaper for every 40 persons while there is 1 television set for every 6.8 persons¹⁸. Total circulation of dailies and weeklies in Indonesia is less than 2 million¹⁹. The low level of literacy and high level of poverty in Indonesia explains the low newspaper readership levels. The media acts as a public forum for views and information. Views and opinions, especially on political and economic issues are freely aired on television and radio talkshows, newspaper commentaries and editorials, and Internet websites. The media serve

¹⁵ Directorate for Press Guidance, Department of Information, 17 Sep 99, personal communication.

¹⁶ The Surabaya-based *Jawa Pos* has succeeded in overtaking the Jakarta-based *Kompas* as the most widely read newspaper in East Java.

¹⁷ "Battle over public opinion", editorial, *The Jakarta Post*, 2 Dec 02, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20021202.E01>

¹⁸ Directorate for Press Guidance, Department of Information, 17 Sep 99.

¹⁹ Endy Bayuni, Deputy Chief Editor, *The Jakarta Post*, personal communication.

a public service role in public information campaigns, eg TV advertisements to educate the public on elections and how to vote or promoting education.

Radio

3 Historically, radio served as a medium for political communication in Indonesia where illiteracy rates were and are still high, especially among the rural population outside the main island of Java. Colonial and post-independence leaders assigned a central role for the radio as the media for national integration because of its wider reach compared to the print media²⁰. Radio played a decisive role in the war of independence against the Dutch, and after independence President Sukarno continued to use radio to consolidate his political power²¹. The nationalistic fervour in radio broadcast continued under President Soeharto's rule especially on state-owned radio. The national ideology *Pancasila* was promulgated through the radio, and later television. The radio promoted political stability and national unity through the public's acceptance of the existing political structures, and mobilised the national ambition of economic development²².

4 Radio is an effective and cheap channel for the dissemination of information and is still a common source of information for Indonesians, from the top to the lower ends of society. It has a wide reach across the archipelago. Radio stations in Indonesia are mostly localised with the exception of the state-owned *Radio Republik Indonesia* (RRI) which has relay stations in the capitals of every province. Apart from RRI, there are a total of over 1,200 radio stations throughout Indonesia²³. Some of these private radio stations still

²⁰ Drew McDaniel, *Electronic Tigers of Southeast Asia – The Politics of Media, Technology and National Development*, Ames: Iowa State University Press, 2002, pg 180.

²¹ Ibid, pg 27.

²² Ibid, pg 180.

²³ Claire Harvey, "World Press Freedom Day 2002: The face of RI media", *The Jakarta Post*, 3 May 02,

broadcast news from RRI while others have their own news bulletins. Previously they were required to broadcast the hourly RRI news bulletin but more and more have given up broadcasting RRI programmes and producing more local content programmes and news.

5 With press freedom, privatisation, and the multiplication of radio stations, radio continues to serve as a medium for communication, especially political discourse and information. The large number of radio stations in Indonesia provides for a greater diversity of opinion in different types of programmes and issues. There has also been a greater segregation of the radio audience market with the increased diversity of radio stations available on the air, eg radio stations catered to the female listener, classical music stations, etc. Besides, radio remains an important source of information especially for those living in the far and isolated corners of the sprawling archipelago. With opportunities afforded by satellite technologies, radio broadcast can now reach a national or international level, and this has helped bridged the isolation between the regions in Indonesia. One successful example of this is the Radio 68H network which is aimed at facilitating information exchange between the regions through the Internet²⁴.

Television

6 Like the radio, Indonesian television played a political and nation-building role in society. Before the introduction of private television stations in 1988, the state-owned television was the main medium of communication with the people aided by the Palapa satellite that spread the reach of television across the archipelago²⁵. Television, with its

available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20020503.B11>.

²⁴ Santoso, "Exchanging News, Bridging Isolation", *Inside Indonesia*, Oct-Dec 2002, available at <http://www.insideindonesia.org>.

²⁵ Amrih Widodo, "Consuming Passions", *Inside Indonesia*, Oct-Dec 2002, available at <http://www.insideindonesia.org>.

visual image and sound, is a powerful media and superior to the other media. It helped in the country's efforts at nation-building, and strengthening national identity and cohesion. Television viewership reached 79.3% compared to magazine readership (29.3%), newspapers (31.9%) and radio (42.1%)²⁶. A 1998 survey recorded 49 million homes with television, which is over 90% of all homes in the country, an estimated 3.5 million homes equipped for reception of satellite television, and in cities in Sumatra, the penetration of satellite television was 18%²⁷. There are currently 10 major commercial TV stations that broadcast on 11 channels from Jakarta, including the recently corporatised *Televisi Republik Indonesia* (TVRI). Until 1989, TVRI was the only television station in Indonesia. Although it still has the widest coverage, its audience share and popularity are one of the lowest, probably suffering from the stigma of being controlled by the government. In addition to the main channel, the provincial TVRI centres broadcast a separate channel for local content. TVRI has 23 stations and 395 transmitters across the archipelago²⁸. Since 2003, the government has changed the status of TVRI from being a state-owned company to a limited liability company but as a result, government funding to the station has practically ended and the station suffers from an internal management tussle that has hampered the transition from state-owned station to a privatised one²⁹.

7 Privatisation of the television industry in the late 1980s did not lead to dilution of the government's regulation of information nor a shift towards more democratic or market-driven media³⁰, instead, most of the new commercial television stations that sprung up are

²⁶ "News is hot on television", *The Jakarta Post*, 13 Feb 00, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20000213.@03>.

²⁷ McDaniel, pg 141.

²⁸ Devi Asmarani, "Plug pulled on Medan TV station", *The Straits Times*, 9 April 2003, available at <http://www.straitstimes.com>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Amrih Widodo, "Consuming Passions", in *Inside Indonesia*, Oct-Dec 2002, available at

owned by people who are either related or connected to the family of former president Soeharto³¹. All have a wide reach across the country and are popular amongst the large urban population in the cities in Java and Sumatra, thus giving them a potentially powerful influence over public opinion. However, in the remote areas and provinces, TVRI is still the only station available. Under Soeharto, only the state-owned stations were allowed to broadcast news programmes and all private radio and television stations had to relay their news bulletins³². After Soeharto's resignation, the stations gradually stopped this practice and produced their own news programmes. There has since been a proliferation of political talk shows and current affairs programmes on television, reflecting the mood of openness and reform in the political environment, and news have become a main attraction on television³³.

8 Despite the popularity of television as a source of news and information in recent years, entertainment is still the mainstay in television programme content. Except for the all-news channel Metro TV, all nine private and state broadcasters rely on entertainment for about 75% of their programming³⁴. Indonesian rules require that broadcasters must fill at least 70% of their schedule with locally-produced programmes³⁵. With the proliferation of television stations and competition amongst them, more programming content was required to fill the airwaves and a thriving industry developed to produce local drama serials (called *sinetron* – literally meaning electronic cinema) to meet the demand. *Sinetron*

<http://www.insideindonesia.org>.

³¹ For instance, one of the largest and most popular TV stations RCTI is owned by PT Bimantara Citra whose majority shareholder is Soeharto's son Bambang Trihatmodjo; SCTV's main shareholder is PT Mitrasari Persada which is owned by Soeharto's cousin Sudwikatmono; TPI is owned by Soeharto's eldest daughter Tutut; and Latvi is owned by the former Manpower Minister and Soeharto family crony Abdul Latief.

³² Under the old Broadcast Law No. 24/1997, the private television stations were required to relay the state-run TVRI news programmes at 7 pm and 9 pm.

³³ "News is hot on television", *The Jakarta Post*, 13 Feb 00, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20000213.@03>.

³⁴ Widodo, pg 2.

became wildly popular with the audience, and this phenomenon partly explains the rapid expansion of television viewership in Indonesia³⁶. The massive production of *sinetron*, however, sacrificed quality for quantity as most of these production were hurriedly made and lacked creativity or a good storyline. *Sinetron* was relatively immune to the political and social changes in the country, and it has served as a medium for the new middle class to “symbolically establish and maintain their self-identity and group membership”³⁷. *Sinetron* is also popular amongst the lower-income group and it provides them an outlet to escape their daily grind and live in an imagined world beyond their reach.

Print media

9 Compared to the broadcast media organisations which had a history of being more closely tied to the government, the print media organisations are privately-owned. The print media consists of a diverse field dominated by three major private media groups, namely Kompas-Gramedia Group, Jawa Pos Group and Media Indonesia/Surya Persindo Group. Together they own a web of publications at the regional and national levels. There are also some independently-owned publications, and the regional and metropolitan press. There are several major newspapers in the Indonesian language, the largest of which is *Kompas* (circulation: about 600,000), *Jawa Pos* (450,000), *Republika* (325,000), *Suara Pembaruan* (350,000) and *Media Indonesia* (250,000)³⁸. These circulation levels are comparatively low compared to Indonesia’s population of over 200 million. The only English-language daily *The Jakarta Post* caters to the expatriate community (40%), and English-speaking Indonesians (60%). During the Soeharto years, it published articles

³⁵ McDaniel, pg 144.

³⁶ Ibid, pg 143.

³⁷ Widodo, pg 3.

³⁸ Figures from the websites and other publicity material of the respective newspapers. *Pos Kota*, a tabloid published by former Information Minister Harmoko, enjoys the highest circulation but it does not have a

critical of the government but because of its readers were mainly foreigners, it was allowed a longer rein. Two other English-language newspapers, *Indonesia Times* and *The Indonesian Observer*, folded in 1998 and 2001, respectively, for financial reasons. At the provincial level, the regional press dominate the local scene although the national dailies like *Kompas* and *Jawa Pos* are also widely read. The two media giants own many of these regional press eg the Jawa Pos Group owns Riau Pos. Many of the smaller newspapers obtain their reports from the autonomous, semi-government-owned *Antara* news agency, which has the largest network of bureaux in all parts of the country.

10 Besides the dailies, there are about a hundred weekly magazines in circulation. The main political newsmagazines are *Tempo*, *Gatra*, and *Forum*. These journals are mainly engaged in in-depth reporting and investigative journalism. Many of their weekly cover stories have shaped and influenced the political agenda and public opinion. Very often, the cover stories of these magazines become the political issue for the week.

Foreign media

11 There are about 76 accredited foreign correspondents in Indonesia³⁹. Foreign media interest in Indonesia had increased since 1997/98 with the spotlight on Indonesia during the economic and political crisis. Under the new Press Law passed in the post-Soeharto period, foreign investors are permitted to own up to a maximum of 49 per cent in the local press industry⁴⁰ to encourage foreign investment into the media industry that had suffered during the economic crisis. The liberalisation of the local press industry has seen several foreign newspapers such as the Asian Wall Street Journal setting up publication in

“serious” content, focussing on trivial and criminal news catered to the working class population.

³⁹ Directorate for Press Guidance, Department of Information, personal communication, 17 Sep 99.

⁴⁰ Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 40 Tahun 1999 Tentang Pers.

Indonesia. Foreign radio stations which air news programmes in Bahasa Indonesia include the BBC World Service and Voice of America.

The media under Soeharto

12 Soeharto's New Order government held the media under a tight rein. The press could not report on issues like regionalism, religion, race or class conflict, business interest of the Soeharto family, or human rights abuses by the armed forces. Most of these regulations were unwritten rules or were unclear, but if they were violated, the government could impose a ban on them. Tools for government control of the media, both print and broadcast, came in the form of licenses issued by the Minister of Information that could be revoked from an errant publication or station. At least thirty publications were banned or temporarily suspended under Soeharto's regime for running stories that offended or insulted the government⁴¹, eg *Tempo* in 1994⁴². In the case of commercial television stations, the government can "freeze" its broadcasting license pending the court's decision on its withdrawal or refuse the renewal of its license⁴³. Editors were often intimidated to submission by the Indonesian military's socio-political affairs section⁴⁴. All that was needed was a telephone call from the Armed Forces headquarters. Bribery, or the "envelope culture", was a common practice among journalists⁴⁵ and journalists were under

⁴¹"Legislature approves new press bill", *The Jakarta Post*, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=19990914.A03>.

⁴² *Tempo* magazine had reported on a conflict between the Minister of Research and Technology Habibie, and Defence Minister Edi Sudradjat and Finance Minister Mar'ie Muhammad on the former's controversial decision to purchase East German navy vessels.

⁴³ Leen d'Haenens, Chantal Verelst, and Effendi Gazali, "In search of quality measures for Indonesian television news", in David French and Michael Richards (eds), *Television in Contemporary Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Publications), 2000.

⁴⁴ "Good press, bad press", *The Jakarta Post*, 7 Jan 02, available at http://web.lexis-nexis/universe/document?_m=916e3537dd50cc0481cde21d368c7

⁴⁵ Angela Romano, "I always throw the envelope away", *Inside Indonesia*, No. 54, April-June 1998, available at <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edit54/angela.htm>.

physical threat to toe the government line⁴⁶. Operating under a climate of fear, the media exercised self-restraint and self-censorship, and the media was forced to conceal facts and told half-truths.

The post-Soerharto media

13 The reform movement in 1997/98 brought the media to the fore with wide news coverage of the student demonstrations⁴⁷. The Trisakti shooting incident⁴⁸ that was followed by days of rioting in Jakarta and Soeharto's resignation on 21 May 1998 marked the beginning of a new era of free press in Indonesia. This culminated with the enactment of the new Press Law in 1999 that guaranteed the freedom of the press. The media industry in Indonesia has mushroomed under the reform era following the fall of Soeharto. After 32 years of Soeharto rule, the public had developed an insatiable thirst for information and soaked up the hundreds of new publications that sprouted out. The number of publication licenses issued before and after the Soeharto resignation jumped from 289 to 1,379⁴⁹. (However, the latest data shows that only 556 publications are left to date, down from a peak of 1,881⁵⁰.)

⁴⁶ Amnesty International, "Death of a journalist", *Inside Indonesia*, No. 52, October-December 1997, available at <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edit/edit52/amnesty.htm>.

⁴⁷ A'an Suryana and Berni K. Moestafa, "Press and public go their separate ways after 1998", *The Jakarta Post*, 18 May 02, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20020518.A07>.

⁴⁸ On 12 May 1998, some unknown Indonesian snipers from military shot four protesting students as they were walking back to the Trisakti University campus in west Jakarta. The shooting deaths of the students triggered mob violence and unrest throughout Jakarta on 13-15 May 1998 that eventually led to the resignation of President Soeharto.

⁴⁹ Since May 98, a total of 1,379 new publishing licenses were issued. Of the total 1,668 publishing licences held to date, however, only about half of them are operational as many publishers hold multiple licences for future publications or for fear of losing their licences. However, many have also reduced their frequency of publication while some have stopped publishing altogether.

⁵⁰ Lukas Luwarso, "Give freedom of the press a chance", *Inside Indonesia*, Oct-Dec 2002, available at <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edit72/Theme%20Lukas.htm..>

Regulation of the media

14 The Indonesian media today can be described as being loosely regulated by the government and self-regulated by the media industry itself. Under Law 40/1999 on the Press, the press is protected from bans and freedom of information is assured. Press freedom was declared a basic right of a citizen, and a fine of Rp 500 million or a jail term of up to two years for individuals, officials or institutions that obstruct the press freedom. The key feature was the lifting of the publishing license issued by the Department of Information. This was the repressive weapon used by the government to censor the media under Soeharto. Now publishing companies only need to register their business with the government.

15 The government adopts a policy of media self-regulation⁵¹. The Press Law provides for an independent, nine-member National Press Council, comprising industry representatives and members of the public. (Under Soeharto, the Press Council was made up of members appointed by the Minister of Information.) The roles of the press council are to uphold press freedom, and the journalistic code of ethics, and mediate public complaints filed against the press⁵². It is left to the press to decide on what is fit to be published. Certain sensitive and potentially inflammatory issues involving ethnicity, race, religion and class (*SARA* rule: ethnicity [*Suku*], religion [*Agama*], race [*Ras*] and social class [*Antargolongan*], considered taboo subjects under Soeharto, are still carefully handled by the media.

⁵¹ “Media self-censorship is essential”, *The Jakarta Post*, 28 Mar 01, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20010328.A05>.

⁵² “New Press Council members elected”, *The Jakarta Post*, 11 Mar 00, available at

16 Under the Press Law, journalists are free to form or join their own associations. Previously, there was only one official journalist association, *Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia* (Indonesian Journalists Union – PWI). There are now at least 26 journalist associations and one newspaper publishers’ association. The journalist associations have drawn up their common Journalist Code of Ethics to regulate the behaviour of its members and uphold professionalism and moral and ethical standards. Journalists who violate the code are subject to sanction by their own associations. In addition, journalists are also subject to the criminal code on slander and libel. There are also numerous private media watchdogs that regularly monitor the media’s work and report on their shortcomings.

17 Another piece of legislation in the regulation of the media is the Broadcast Act (2002), recently passed in late November 2002. Under the new law, an independent Indonesian Broadcasting Commission will be established as the regulatory body that will set standards of programming on religious, moral and other social content, and issue other guidelines and regulations⁵³. The controversial new law was decried as repressive by broadcasters and an attempt by the government to control the television stations. It retains the practice of issuing broadcasting licenses and ends the nation-wide broadcasting rights by requiring national television networks to collaborate with local partners. This is seen as a boon to community broadcast networks that will provide alternative views and information especially at the local levels, apart from the existing centralised stations⁵⁴

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20000311.A04>.

⁵³ Kurniawan Hari, “Broadcast bill passed despite protests”, *The Jakarta Post*, 29 Nov 02, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20021129.@01>.

⁵⁴ Kurniawan Hari, “New broadcast law promote decentralisation: supporters”, *The Jakarta Post*, 1 Dec 02, available at

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20021130.@05&iirc=8>.

Chapter III

ROLE AND EFFECTS OF THE MEDIA IN POLITICS

1 The media has a powerful impact in shaping public opinion. It is a potent tool in affecting public affairs and policy. Its impact on politics and policy is played through biased reporting, and its agenda setting, priming and framing effects that can influence how people think, and hence, political outcomes. Given its potentially powerful impact on politics, the media could play a role in society, in promoting democracy and good governance. According to liberal political theories, a “free and independent press can play a vital role in the process of democratisation by contributing towards the right of freedom of expression, thought and conscience, and strengthening the responsiveness of governments to all citizens, and providing a pluralist platform of political expression for a multiplicity of groups”⁵⁵. The availability of information is critical to the quality of decision-making by citizens and policy-makers. Access to information ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation⁵⁶. The free press, by disseminating information, plays a role in strengthening the process of democracy through their “watchdog” role, promoting transparency in government and public scrutiny of those in authority, highlighting policy failures, exposing corruption, and scandals etc⁵⁷. Finally, the free press provides a civic forum for public deliberation between citizens and the state and debate on the major issues of the day, especially during political campaigns⁵⁸. Liberal theories have stressed the critical role of the free media in a democracy, to keep the government in check. A free

⁵⁵ Pippa Norris, “Giving Voice to the Voiceless – Good Governance, human development and mass communications”, available at <http://www.pippanorris.com>.

⁵⁶ Center for Democracy and Governance, *The Role of Media in Democracy: A strategic approach*, Washington DC: USAID, 1999, pg 3.

⁵⁷ Pippa Norris.

press in a democracy could foster good governance and development.

Media and politics

2 Historically, the press in Indonesia had played a role in the struggle for independence against Dutch colonial rule. During the Soeharto regime, the press played a role in supporting the government's goals of national unity and development⁵⁹. Given the tight control on the press and the government's emphasis on economic development in the media's role, the press served only a minor political function, only during election campaigns where the government party's platform and programmes were disseminated to the electorate. According a senior editor, the press has done a lot in promoting democracy and civil society in the freer environment since 1999⁶⁰. It has helped to make people more aware about their rights, to make them more critical about the government, and help them make the right choices during elections. The media has an important role in promoting civic consciousness in society.

3 The Indonesian media plays an influential role in shaping public opinion. The print media, although with a relatively limited readership pool⁶¹, is powerful in that it is read by the elite and intellectuals, who have control and influence over policy-making. The media takes on a role for itself to promote the process of nation-building, including building democracy⁶². This includes helping to build or reform the public institutions and developing a political culture that is more attuned to democracy. It also takes on the role of setting the nation's political agenda, such as in pushing for more political reforms.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Leen d'Haenens et al, 2000, pg 202.

⁶⁰ Endy Bayuni, personal communication, April 2003.

⁶¹ The newspaper readership level is relatively low at 15 million for a population of more than 210 million or about 1 newspaper for every 40 persons.

4 In addition, the media sees it as its obligation to communicate and disseminate the government's policies, including their rationale, to the public⁶³. The mass media, especially the state-owned television station TVRI and radio station RRI, are the government's most effective medium of communication with the people, informing and educating them on government policies. But communication is no longer a one-way traffic as in the past, according to the Deputy Chief Editor of *The Jakarta Post* Endy Bayuni. The media's other obligation is also to inform the government about the people's reception towards these policies. The most recent example of this double role was the hike in the utility prices in January 2003. The government did not make its case for raising the prices very convincingly, so the public rejected it. The government eventually backed down and reversed its decision because of the widespread opposition. However, Bayuni feels that the majority of the press tends to side with the people, and it is under no obligation to helping the government communicate with the public. The failure of the government is in its own inability to communicate effectively with the people. He feels that there is a limit to how far the press can help to communicate its policies. Ultimately, it is the government that has to make the greater effort at communicating with the people.

Media's impact on politics and democracy

May 1998 events

5 The Indonesian press played a role in facilitating the transition to democracy in Indonesia. It was partly responsible for bringing down the Soeharto regime in 1998. In its role in disseminating information and giving a voice to the people, it helped to galvanise

⁶² Endy Bayuni, personal communication, April 2003.

⁶³ Ibid.

the pro-democracy movement in the dying weeks of the Soeharto regime. During those tumultuous days in May 1998, the private television stations and newspapers defied orders from their owners and the government's attempts to control information through a censored media pool arrangement, and covered the riots and student demonstrations that precipitated the downfall of the Soeharto regime and the birth of a free press. Through its coverage, the media took on the role of channelling, representing, and stoking the people's anger at the military's shooting of student demonstrators in the Trisakti incident⁶⁴.

6 The public demand for information about what was going on in that tumultuous week of riots and looting in May 1998 fed a media frenzy. Even as the Soeharto regime lost its control and legitimacy, a media revolution was already quietly taking place during that period. Television coverage of the student demonstrations gradually crept into the television screens until the overwhelming competition among the media to cover the events that cumulated with the Jakarta riots on 13-15 May 1998 and Soeharto's resignation on 21 May 1998, pushed the media into a significantly increased level of freedom⁶⁵. Since then, the Indonesian media has taken on a self-declared role as the "fourth estate" in the new democracy. After the initial euphoria of its new-found role and freedom, the media's performance in carrying out this political role has been disappointing. In the view of an Indonesian journalist, the press could do a lot more in its political role but much depends on its own capability to become a free and credible press. (The topic of press freedom is explored further in Chapter V.)

General elections 1999

7 After helping to end authoritarian rule in Indonesia, the media moved on to play a

⁶⁴ Unknown snipers shot and killed student demonstrators outside Trisakti University in Jakarta in May 1998

major role in socialising the population to the new rules of democratic politics through its coverage of political interactions and debates. In the run-up to the 1999 general elections, the first free and fair elections in three decades, the media was one of the means to educate the Indonesian electorate on the democratic process. Television and radio became the crucial campaign media, in addition to rallies and direct face-to-face walkabouts by the politicians. The media was the channel to showcase and present the hundreds of new political parties to an electorate that was still used to only three Soeharto-era parties (Golkar, PPP and PDI). The larger parties with more resources ran slick television advertisements to woo voters. The official national elections commission and other independent election monitors ran television and radio campaigns to educate the public on the elections process. The media was used as it was the most effective channel to reach a mass audience spread across the wide archipelago.

8 The image of the politicians and of politics that emerged from the coverage of election campaigns is crucial as it can influence public perceptions of the parties⁶⁶. In Indonesia, politics is still essentially personality-based, as it lacks a strong foundation in developed party politics as a consequence of 32 years under authoritarian rule. In terms of the media's coverage of the general elections, many media observers have concluded that it was biased⁶⁷. All the television stations were criticised for giving undue coverage to Golkar, the incumbent ruling party of then-President Habibie, the government and the military. An example of this bias was when a TVRI news anchor cut off an interview when the interviewee spoke critically of Golkar. The level of media bias in the print media was

that sparked off days of mass looting and rioting that eventually led to the resignation of President Soeharto.

⁶⁵ d'Haenens, pg 228.

⁶⁶ Mercy Ette, "Agent of Change or Stability? The Nigerian Press Undermines Democracy", *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 5.3, 2000, 74.

⁶⁷ "Media's election coverage biased, say observers", *The Jakarta Post*, 15 Jul 99, available at

also very clear. Newspapers such as *Merdeka* and its breakaway *Rakyat Merdeka* that had a long history of links with Megawati's father and founding President Soekarno, were openly pro-Megawati. The front-page pictures of huge election campaign rallies where an estimated 1 million Megawati supporters flooded the streets of Jakarta on the eve of the elections could have swayed many voters into voting for the winning side⁶⁸. The print media's sympathetic portrayal of Megawati as victim of Soeharto's repression helped her party's cause. A senior Indonesian journalist credits the press for helping to turn Megawati into what she is now since 1996 when she first began to make a political impact.

9 The ownership structure of the media and the association of these media companies to certain political parties or individuals explain the media bias⁶⁹. The mainstream print media like *Kompas*, *Tempo*, *Media Indonesia*, and *Jawa Pos* are generally regarded as neutral and non-partisan. These newspapers have been able to remain independent because of the nature of their diversified ownership. However, the media had always had an antagonistic relationship with Habibie, who was portrayed as "Soehartoist" and was relentless in its critical coverage of the Habibie presidency. During President Habibie's brief term of office, only the Habibie-linked and ICMI⁷⁰-owned *Republika*, took a blatantly pro-Habibie and pro-Golkar bias. Many political parties also published their own newspapers or magazines to air their party platforms such as *Demokrat* (owned by Megawati's party PDIP), *Amanat* (Amien Rais' PAN) and *Duta Masyarakat* (Abdulrahman Wahid's PKB), while Golkar owns *Suara Karya*. The private television stations are mostly owned by the Soeharto clan and its cronies. According to an Indonesian

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=19990715.A03>.

⁶⁸ Megawati's PDIP eventually won the elections with a majority vote of about 35%.

⁶⁹ Damien Kingsbury, *The Politics of Indonesia*, (2nd ed), Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002, pg 139.

⁷⁰ ICMI is the acronym for the Association of Muslim Intellectuals that was headed by Habibie when he was a Minister in Soeharto's cabinet. ICMI owns the newspaper *Republika*.

journalist, these stations can influence public opinion about the Soeharto family through their coverage and they have been doing it effectively. For instance, some television stations still referred to the former President respectfully⁷¹ and tended to cast him in a sympathetic light compared to the print media. The newly-appointed management of the recently corporatised TVRI has cast doubts on the station's non-partisanship, given that its chief director is the secretary general of a major political party and a former military officer⁷².

Political crisis 2000-2001

10 The Indonesian media has had a major impact on the conduct of politics in Indonesia since its democratisation process began in 1998. Through the slant it took in its coverage of Indonesian politics, the media played out its agenda-setting and priming effects. Agenda-setting is a process that can affect the reader in what to think about and how to think about an issue⁷³. The agenda-setting effects of the media include shaping the direction of public opinion on an issue and altering the standards by which we evaluate the political leaders⁷⁴. During the presidency of Abdulrahman Wahid, who succeeded Habibie in September 1999, the media waged an undeclared war against him until his ouster in August 2001. Although Wahid enjoyed a brief honeymoon period with the media till early 2000, he soon developed a rocky relationship with them until his ouster in 2001. The media unrelentingly highlighted his mistakes, magnified the significance of the political intrigues against him,

⁷¹ Some television stations address former President Soeharto fondly and respectfully as "Pak Harto" ("Mr Harto, a fond nickname) while other media just name him "Soeharto".

⁷² Budi Harsono is currently Secretary General of Golkar Party, one of the two largest parties in parliament and the main party vehicle under Soeharto's regime. He also held a prominent position in the military.

⁷³ Holli Semetko, "The Media", in Lawrence LeDuc, et al (eds), *Comparing Democracies – Elections and Voting in Global Perspective*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 274.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 275.

and downplayed his achievements⁷⁵. It did not help that Wahid was prone to making careless off-the-cuff remarks in public that the media seized upon as ammunition to attack him with. The media's negative portrayal of Wahid contributed largely to the decline in the people's confidence in the government in overcoming the economic and political crises in the country. Towards the end of the Wahid presidency, public confidence in the government was at the lowest level and there was a shared desire for change in the national leadership. A senior Indonesian journalist commented that the press was partly responsible for bringing down Wahid in 2001 as part of the larger movement against the then president Wahid.

11 The entire media industry was explicitly opposed to Wahid. It could be seen that the media had a direct hand in setting the agenda in Indonesian politics between 1999-2001. The weekly newsmagazines adopted an investigative form of journalism, uncovering and highlighting many scandals, cases of corruption and political intrigues. The media's relentless coverage of the Baligate⁷⁶ scandal had probably contributed to Habibie's loss in the 1999 presidential elections. In the biggest of such financial scandals, *Kompas* uncovered what became known as the Bulogate scandal⁷⁷ that eventually led to the Wahid's impeachment in August 2001. *Panji* magazine waged a personal attack on Wahid by exposing an alleged sex scandal. The media was accused of highlighting and exaggerating the rift between the Wahid and Vice President Megawati (who later succeeded him). These scandals raised in the media not only tarnished the image of the

⁷⁵ Jeffery Sng, "Wahid and Indonesia's media politics", *Seeds of Peace*, vol 17, no. 2, 2001, available at [http://www.siam21.org/sop/17-2indonesia\(3\).html](http://www.siam21.org/sop/17-2indonesia(3).html).

⁷⁶ This was the first of many scandals exposed by the media involving corruption and embezzlement that bear the "-gate" suffix borrowed from the Watergate scandal. In the Baligate case, Habibie's party Golkar was alleged to have received contributions illegally from Bank Bali.

⁷⁷ Bulog is the acronym of the national logistics agency. Funds totalling \$4.1 million were allegedly embezzled from the agency by Wahid's masseur Suwondo. The media played up Suwondo's disappearance

President in the public eye, but they contributed to the perception of a prolonged political and economic crisis in Indonesia. The media's agenda-setting and priming effects influenced the public perception and support for their political leaders.

12 The ownership structure and editorial make-up of these media companies, and their political associations with certain parties and individuals could explain the role the media took in politics during the 2000-2001 period. Ownership and control of the media are largely in the hands of Wahid's political opponents and so-called Soehartoists - those related or linked to the Soeharto family and who have an interest in preserving the status quo. It is alleged that *Kompas*, although Catholic-founded and owned, had been penetrated by radical Muslims who used the newspaper to criticise the moderate Muslim Wahid⁷⁸. *Kompas* was initially supportive of Abdulrahman Wahid until divisions appeared between senior and junior journalists over the paper's political stance, and it soon took on an anti-Wahid position⁷⁹. *Suara Pembaruan*, a major afternoon daily owned by Protestant Christians, is known to be linked to elements in PDIP, and certain factions in the military. The family of former president Soeharto was directly involved in the media sector through a recently-established news weekly *Garda*. The now-defunct *Panji* magazine was a Muslim-based publication owned by a Fuad Bawazier, Partai Amanant (PAN) member, and former Soeharto crony/minister and who is closely linked to the camp of Amien Rais, current Chairman of the People's Consultative Assembly and PAN Chairman. Amien Rais also belongs to the Muslim association Muhammadiyah which is the arch rival of Wahid's moderate Muslim group Nahdhatul Ulama. *Panji* was one of the magazines that was stridently anti-Wahid. However, *Panji*'s chief editor has denied the political link or motive,

and alluded to Wahid's complicity in the case.

⁷⁸ The Chief Editor of *Kompas*, Suryopratomo, is a Muslim. He is the first Muslim ever to hold that position in the country's largest and most influential newspaper which is Catholic-owned.

explaining that Fuad's interest in Panji was purely business and that he never interfered in the magazine's editorial content. She also defended *Panji's* coverage of politics and that the media was merely playing its watchdog role in checking the government through its investigative journalism⁸⁰. But it is clear that some media owners and politicians had used their position and links in the media to advance their own political interests by selective or biased coverage of events and issues. Even the Internet news media was politicised. Indonesia's political and news websites were dominated by three main sources associated with interests aligned with rival political groups⁸¹. An Indonesian journalist has commented that "all media play with some factions, depending on who is in power or who is likely to be"⁸².

Media and conflict

Maluku

13 The Indonesian media has influenced conflicts through biased coverage and the choice of media frames used in reporting them. These could have a significant effect of fuelling the conflicts. Gadi Wolfsfeld (1997)'s political contest model suggests that "to understand the role of the news media in politics is to view the competition over the news media as part of a larger and more significant contest among political antagonists for political control". The media use frames to construct a story that can be understood by their audience⁸³. In constructing frames, journalists think through three question: (a) how did we cover this conflict in the past? (b) What is the most newsworthy part of the conflict

⁷⁹ Kingsbury, pg 139.

⁸⁰ Uni Lubis, personal communication.

⁸¹ Kingsbury, pg 140.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Gadi Wolfsfeld, Media and political conflict, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 31.

(c) who are the good guys⁸⁴. Wolfsfeld explains that the ways in which journalists answer these questions are closely tied to the cultural base of each news medium.

14 The Indonesian media has been criticised for fanning the conflict in Maluku with its biased reporting and coverage⁸⁵. The religious clashes between the Muslim and Christian population in the Maluku islands in eastern Indonesia was seemingly triggered by a trivial dispute between two individuals in Ambon island in 1999. The single event led to years of violent ethnic fighting between the two communal groups, sometimes sporadic other times widespread. Like many other ethnic and religious conflicts elsewhere in Indonesia, the one in Maluku was sparked off by rumours or provocative news reports. The conflict was complicated by local politics and the involvement of the military in petty quarrels over extortion money. But the media's depicted the conflict as a religious war.

15 In the Maluku case, the media's depiction of the conflict had a significant impact on shaping and inflaming the people's opinion. The media's choice of frames played a significant role in fuelling the conflict. As Wolfsfeld explains that media frames are chosen based on the cultural base of each news medium, so it could be seen that the press coverage on the Maluku conflict was divided between the Muslim and Christian perspectives. Free from government censorship especially over taboo topics like religion and ethnicity, the press became bolder in reporting the clashes as a religious conflict. *Republika* and *Panji*, both Muslim-based publications, have been singled out for their biased and one-sided reports on the conflict that inflamed sentiments and fuelled the clashes. Implicitly acknowledging their bias, the editors of the two newspapers have acknowledged that their

⁸⁴ Ibid, 49.

⁸⁵ "Editors deny press adds to political conflicts", *The Jakarta Post*, 9 Feb 01, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20010209.A02>

correspondents in Maluku were Muslims and were hence sympathetic to the Muslim side in the conflict⁸⁶. More radical Islamic publications have inflamed the situation in Maluku by characterising the conflict as between Muslims and Christians⁸⁷, and taking sides in the dispute.

16 What started out as a local dispute in Ambon has become mired into an ethnic conflict because of the media's biased coverage that resulted in inflaming hatred between the two religious groups. The Governor of Maluku province has appealed to the National Press Council to help the media in telling the truth and being objective in reporting the conflict⁸⁸. In the Maluku case, the media have become players and weapons in the conflict. Several local newspapers were allegedly specially created to cash in on the inter-religious sentiments. *Jawa Pos* has been criticised for profiteering from the conflict by establishing provocative newspapers each catering to the Muslim and Christian readership, and inflaming the tensions between both groups.

Role of the media in conflict resolution

17 Just as the media has played a negative role in fanning and taking part in conflict, it could play its part in resolving them. The press could reduce tensions and promote conflict management and resolution through responsible reporting and by being honest in reporting about the conflicts⁸⁹. The national press has generally exercised self-censorship and responsibility by sticking to the traditional taboo against reporting religious and ethnic

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ "Islamic media defy taboos on sensitive reporting", *The Jakarta Post*, 15 Feb 00, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20000215.D02>.

⁸⁸ "Twisted media reports deplored", *The Jakarta Post*, 28 Feb 01, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20010228.B11>.

⁸⁹ Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick, "Peace journalism in Poso", *Inside Indonesia*, No. 66, Apr-Jun 2001, available at <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edit66/peace1.htm>.

issues. For instance, *The Jakarta Post* would report about “communal clashes” rather than terming them ethnic or religious conflicts. An editor of a major newspaper said that the press had avoided publishing pictures of native Dayaks holding up the severed heads of immigrant Madurese during the violent clashes in West Kalimantan in 1999. Local copies of an edition of *Time* magazine that carried pictures of beheaded corpses and severed heads were blacked out on orders of the government for fear of escalating the conflict further. However, this form of “self-denial” coverage did not stop tensions in the troubled areas. Instead, the media could adopt peace journalism. Peace journalism equips journalists to take an ethical and positive approach in covering the conflicts⁹⁰.

18 By framing conflict stories in an honest, objective and neutral manner it could expand the space to consider shared solutions⁹¹, instead of the media’s usual practice of apportioning blame (“who are the good/bad guys” question). Many of Indonesia’s ethnic and religious strife were triggered by a complex web of background factors such as local politics, local police-military rivalry, and corruption, collusion and nepotism (*KKN*) practices. Through a peace frame, the press could illuminate these real problems, deflecting the focus on the religious or ethnic nature of the conflict. Religious and ethnic tensions are merely a cover for these underlying issues. Peace journalism does not try to explain reasons for violence but emphasises the real reasons for conflict and focus on the positive efforts made by mediators for peace.

19 It is common in Indonesia for communal conflicts to be sparked by provocateurs. Rumours and misinformation often start new clashes just when the conflict appears to be

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

tapering off. This is symptomatic of a poor information system in the community, where access to the media is limited. The press could fill in the information gaps by providing timely and accurate information to quell the rumours. In publicising and correcting misinformation, the press could contribute to building peace. To report or not is a choice made by journalists; journalists must take responsibility for their choices, in this case, to report is to make a positive choice for peace⁹².

Media and foreign policy

20 Besides domestic politics, the media plays a role in and influences foreign policy. According to Serfaty (1990), the growth in the reach and influence of the media has complicated the processes of formulating and conducting foreign policy in the following ways⁹³:

- (a) policy makers are sensitive to, and even fearful of, the media coverage, and willingly devote much of their time to explaining foreign policy goals, methods and constraints;
- (b) the media often serves as a monitor or megaphone to transmit propositions that the government wants to place on the agenda, and the debate these may generate, that is, the government sets the agenda. However, although the media do not usually determine the foreign policy agenda, they clearly wield a large amount of influence;
- (c) the media can influence the course of international events and relations. Its coverage of events outside can put political pressure for government action; and
- (d) the press coverage of foreign policy brings it to the attention of the public whose reaction determines the level of support or opposition received by the government.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Simon Serfaty, "The media and foreign policy", in *The Media and Foreign Policy*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1990, pp 2-7.

East Timor

21 The media sees its role in being an unelected ombudsman with the role of informing the public of government policies and activities, including foreign relations, admonishing the government when it is found lacking or ineffective. On the other hand, the Indonesian press, like most national press, is very nationalistic. It defends the national side on a foreign policy issue vis-à-vis another country. The East Timor episode and the Indonesian media's biased coverage of the referendum and its aftermath provides a clear illustration of the strong nationalistic tendencies of the national press. It also illustrates the effects of media framing of the East Timor case and shaping public opinion in the process.

22 The Indonesian press coverage of 1999 East Timor referendum was shaped by the years of limited access to the territory to Indonesian journalists from 1976-1999, when information on East Timor was filtered through the government and military⁹⁴. Conditioned by the propaganda put out by the Indonesian military in the past, and also coloured by its own nationalistic lenses, the press took the view that the pro-independence East Timorese supporters were anti-nationalist. In 1999, unlike the international press that was concerned with East Timor's future, much of the Indonesian press coverage on East Timor focussed on the strained relations between Indonesia and Australia. The Indonesian media emphasised nationalism in its coverage. It defended the government's allegation that the UN-organised referendum was fraudulent, that East Timorese had been coerced or cheated by the UN/Australia into voting for independence. This spin put out by the media strengthened the public conviction that Indonesia's territorial integrity had been violated. The press selectively ignored certain facts. For instance, an electoral session held in Dili

⁹⁴ "Mass media a hero in the coverage of E. Timor", The Jakarta Post, 19 Nov 1999, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=19991119.C03>.

clarifying the allegations of ballot fraud (which was unable to be proven) did not gain much coverage in the Indonesian press. As a consequence, the public opinion shaped by the media was that the UN had not been even-handed.

23 The Indonesian media did not take a balanced approach in reporting the East Timor crisis. It failed to educate the Indonesian public about the role of the UN Mission and the UN peacekeepers in East Timor, especially that the peacekeepers were authorised to pursue pro-integration East Timorese militias and disarm them. The violence following the ballot was mainly depicted as reflective of the injustice and anger felt by the pro-integration East Timorese after their loss. No mention was made that these pro-integration militias were hastily trained by the Indonesian military in the months before the ballot. These militiamen were portrayed sympathetically as nationalistic heroes. The action of the UN peacekeepers in pursuing and disarming the militias was negatively depicted, and the Australian-led international mission was painted as an aggressor.

24 The Indonesian press coverage of the East Timor crisis was relentlessly anti-Australia, anti-US and anti-West in general. The national press was almost xenophobic. It criticised the Habibie government for selling out the country to foreigners, especially the US. The press gave prominent coverage of the daily demonstrations staged by Indonesian groups in front of the Australian and US Embassies and UN office in Jakarta. The media gave vent to the public emotions against Australia for its betrayal of Indonesia⁹⁵ The coverage of the demonstrations galvanised sentiments against Australia rather than inform the public of the real issue in East Timor. Anti-Australia op-eds and comments by analysts

⁹⁵ Australia was one of the few countries that recognised Indonesia's annexation of East Timor in 1976. Its active support for East Timor's separation in 1999 was a disappointment to Indonesia which viewed it with

and commentators published in the newspapers added to the nationalistic fervour that was building up. The press had contributed to the worsened ties between Indonesia's relations with Australia, and a lesser extent, the US. The East Timor coverage was framed as a national security and nationalism issue rather than as a human rights issue, and this fuelled the rising tide of anti-West sentiments in Indonesia.

25 One of the main reasons for the unbalanced reporting was the reliance on biased sources. This view is corroborated by a research study on the Indonesian media's coverage of the East Timor crisis conducted by the Aksara Foundation⁹⁶. The findings indicated that the Indonesian press relied on a preponderance of official Indonesian sources as well as pro-integration East Timorese militias and supporters for information. Some of this was explained by the fact that when Indonesian journalists went to East Timor, they stayed at the Indonesian military bases for security reasons. After the violence in East Timor began, the Indonesian journalists left the territory and then relied largely on the government-owned Antara news agency which gave very jingoistic reports. The media's one-sided coverage of the East Timor crisis influenced public opinion and affected Indonesia's relations with Australia and the US.

Relations with Singapore

26 The political liberalisation and freedom of the press in Indonesia has ironically worsened the country's relations with neighbouring Singapore. Relations between the two countries had been cosy under Soeharto, and both were engaged in mutual cooperation projects. Although there were issues that remained unresolved in the bilateral agenda, these

suspicion.

⁹⁶ Oren Murphy, personal communication, 20 April 2003.

were not reported nor even made known in the media. Foreign policy decision-making in Indonesia was confined to the state, especially the President and the Foreign Ministry. In the politically liberalised period after Soeharto, the press began to play a role in influencing the government's foreign policy by highlighting areas where the government's action was considered weak. This was part of the watchdog role it had taken upon itself to check government power and corruption. The press began to take an active role and interest in foreign policy, and became critical of the government's relations with and policy towards Singapore.

27 Media perception of the neighbouring state was mixed. Some members of the Indonesian press adopt an anti-Singapore bias, reflective of the sentiments felt by some members of the Indonesian elite who viewed Singapore as arrogant, selfish, insensitive, and opportunistic⁹⁷. Some viewed the Indonesia-Singapore relationship in terms of an *abang-adik* (older brother-younger brother) relationship with Indonesians as the elder brother. Singapore, to some, was a mere "little red dot"⁹⁸. There is still a "lingering attitude among Indonesians that tends to view Singapore hardly as an independent and respectable state and nation"⁹⁹. Some perceived that Singapore's development was achieved at the expense of Indonesia. Many believed that Singapore had benefited from, and even had a hand in the collapse of the Indonesian rupiah during the 1997 financial crisis. Singapore was seen to have provided a safe haven for Indonesia's corrupt officials and businessmen. In their view, the Soeharto government and his ethnic Chinese cronies had played out the nation's interest by colluding with Singapore interests in one-sided deals.

⁹⁷ Berni K. Moestafa, "RI-Singapore relations suffer from misperception", *The Jakarta Post*, 13 July 2002, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20020713.B01>.

⁹⁸ This term was coined by then President Habibie when he derisively described Singapore in a press interview in 1998 as a "little red dot". His successor President Abdulrahman Wahid had also made derogative remarks about Singapore.

28 With press freedom, the media began to openly express these negative sentiments about Singapore, and address the perceived grievances in the bilateral relationship without fear of government sanction. These perpetuated the negative sentiments and misperceptions held by some members of the elite. These views soon permeated across the elite and downwards to the general public. Editorials and articles appeared in the press that made allegations against Singapore or that portrayed the neighbouring country in a negative light. In 1999, a series of articles appeared in *Kompas*, and later other newspapers and magazines that alleged that Singapore was exporting toxic waste material to an Indonesian island near Singapore and threatening the local environment and the livelihood of the local fishing population. Despite numerous clarifications and rebuttals, the articles and allegations kept appearing¹⁰⁰. Many articles also appeared in the press reporting of smuggling activities between Singapore and Indonesia that cost a huge loss in taxation to the Indonesian state. In 2001, *Kompas* published an editorial lambasting the Indonesian government for its weak position vis-à-vis Singapore. The editorial took the government to task for the unresolved and sensitive bilateral issues between the two countries. The critical press coverage forced the Indonesian government to respond as parliament and civil society groups applied pressure on the government to assert itself against Singapore. It widened the public awareness of and participation in foreign policy making.

⁹⁹ “RI-Singapore bilateral ties”, *The Jakarta Post*, 12 July 2002.

¹⁰⁰ As the press officer at the Singapore Embassy, I issued letters to the editors and met with many of them and their journalists to clarify the truth of the matter. It appeared that this issue was a case of business rivalry between two Indonesian firms that had competed for a license to import excavated earth and rocks to reclaim an island in Riau province to build a beach resort. The losing firm tried to sabotage its competitor’s winning bid with the series of critical press articles.

Chapter IV

THE INTERNET MEDIA

1 The Internet has brought about an information revolution in the world today, and has become a ubiquitous feature in society. The phenomenal growth of the Internet has created new roles and opportunities, for the individual, businesses, to the government, politicians, and civil society. Likewise, in Indonesia, the Internet has made inroads into society, and this has coincided with the political transition in the country. The post-Soeharto political openness has given Indonesians freedom of the press and expression never seen before for 32 years. The Internet has participated in, and contributed to this new freedom of the press, and in the process, it has created new opportunities in politics, and the news media. This chapter will first explore the Internet's development in Indonesia, assess its role in politics, and the prospects for the development of the Internet.

The Internet landscape

2 Like the old media, the new media in Indonesia is a thriving one. The Internet has developed rapidly since its introduction to Indonesia about ten years ago. An indication of its success in Indonesia is the expansion of the number of Internet Service Providers (ISP) in the country - from just one in 1994 to 60 today¹⁰¹. The number of Internet users in 2002, according to the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), is expected to reach 5 million, an increase from 4.2 m in 2001¹⁰². According to the statistics compiled by the Top Level Domain Indonesia (ID-TLD), there are now a total of 12,413 registered domains in Indonesia, from 2,526 in 1998. Another indication of the penetration of the

¹⁰¹ Onno Purbo, "Getting Connected" in *Inside Indonesia*, Oct-Dec 2002; available from <http://www.insideindonesia.org>.

¹⁰² Fitri Wulandari, "Growth of Internet users slowing down" in *The Jakarta Post*, 22 Oct 02, available from

Internet in Indonesia is the number of Internet cafes (*warung Internet*) that have sprouted across the country, most of which are self-financed and independently set up¹⁰³. Local Internet portals like *detik.com* and *Astaga.com* have mushroomed to cash in from the rising trend, despite the fact that the Internet bubble burst a few years ago.

3 The rise of the Internet in Indonesia paralleled the political openness in the country since 1998. Freed from the authoritarian and repressive control of the Soeharto regime, the print and electronic media enjoyed newfound freedom. The thirst for information was quickly quenched by the new publications that emerged¹⁰⁴. But the demand for real-time information by a public eager to follow closely political events fed the growth of online news media that soon challenged the traditional media. Even the traditional press moved its contents online to boost competition in the print media that was already suffering from the economic crisis¹⁰⁵. Major dailies and magazines in Indonesia such as *Kompas*, *Tempo*, and *The Jakarta Post* all have online editions, while new ones came online eg *detik.com* which was so successful it became an important source for breaking news. The Internet news media give the public real time news, much more so than the 24-hour all-news TV channel Metro TV. Besides the online news websites, there is the short message service (SMS) on the mobile phone network that is often used to disseminate news. Information technology has radically changed the way people get their news, and at a much faster speed than before. However, one must be circumspect in viewing these statistics as the proportion of Internet users in Indonesia is only about five million in a country of over 200 million. The potential, however, is immense.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

¹⁰³ Purbo, 2002.

¹⁰⁴ According to the Department of Information, the number of press licenses issued for daily newspapers grew from 79 (pre-May 1998) to 218 in September 1999. (Personal communication.)

¹⁰⁵ "Internet inroads challenge print media", *The Jakarta Post*, 8 Nov 99; available from

4 The government's laissez faire attitude towards the Internet favoured its growth. During the early years of the Internet, the Soeharto government either did not appreciate the potential of the Internet or did not have the expertise to regulate it. Moreover, there was little the government could do to control the Internet. The then-Information Minister Harmoko, in 1996, conceded that "the flow of information cannot be checked" and stated that he did not have any objection to the Internet version of the newsmagazine Tempo which he had banned in 1994¹⁰⁶. The only Internet-related government regulation covers Internet telephony service as the Internet development at that time was still in its infant stage. But the lack of regulation of the Internet in Indonesia soon became detrimental to its development, leading to problems like cyber crimes and fraud, and social ones like online pornography. As early as 1995, the government tried to block online porn but as there was no specific legislation to regulate or filter Internet access, these attempts at censoring the Internet were futile¹⁰⁷. The Internet is now covered by the new Broadcasting Law passed in November 2002. Although the DPR (parliament) has already endorsed the legislation, the President has not signed it into law because of strong opposition from the broadcast industry¹⁰⁸. The new legislation regulates the content of the Internet, subjects it to the same restrictions imposed on the content of broadcasting media. Meanwhile, several business associations and local universities are now preparing to set up an independent Internet body called the Indonesia Internet Agency, similar to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), to create and refine regulations and policies on the

<http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

¹⁰⁶ Mark Crawford, "Information revolution", in *Inside Indonesia*, Oct-Dec 1996; available from <http://www.insideindonesia.org>.

¹⁰⁷ Justine Fitzgerald, "You wan see jiggy-jig?", in *Inside Indonesia*, Oct-Dec 2002; available from <http://www.insideindonesia.org>.

¹⁰⁸ See chapter II above for a discussion on the controversy surrounding the new Broadcasting Law.

Internet, working together with the government and NGOs¹⁰⁹. At the same time, the government is drafting a set of “cyberlaws” on the use of technology and electronic information and transactions¹¹⁰.

Internet and politics

5 The ubiquitous presence of the Internet in society has been felt in many spheres of life, from politics, to government, to business. There has been much speculation on the impact of the Internet on politics, on the old news media, and for civic society¹¹¹. There have generally been two theories of the Internet and politics: (a) mobilisation theories, and (b) reinforcement theories - the former (cyber optimists) postulates the positive impact on democracy, expanding civic engagement, and fostering new types of mobilisation by NGOs, while the latter (cyber pessimists) suggests that the Internet merely strengthens existing patterns of political participation¹¹². A third view balances the two in that the Internet is seen to have “positive consequences for civic society, altering the balance of relevant resources and slightly levelling the playing field”, especially benefiting marginal groups, protest organisations and alternative social movements¹¹³. The situation in Indonesia appears to be mixed. The Internet certainly plays a role in politics and it is a huge potential that the government and civil society could tap for their own objectives. But its potential is limited by the telecommunications infrastructure and the lack of access to computers and the Internet among the majority of the population.

¹⁰⁹ Fitri Wulandari, “Internet players to set up Internet body”, in *The Jakarta Post*, 31 Oct 02, available from <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

¹¹⁰ “Minister drafts cyber bills”, *The Jakarta Post*, 12 Sep 02, available from <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

¹¹¹ Pippa Norris, *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Chapter 6, available from <http://www.pippanorris.com>.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Pippa Norris, *Digital Divide – Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide* (New

6 In Indonesia, politics and government have found their way into the Internet. First, it has transformed the sources of political news, with the rise of online news media. In the post-Soeharto era of press freedom, the Internet has become the future of news and information as evidenced by the popularity of online news websites as an alternative source of information and news on political developments in the country. Its advantage over the old media is its ability to report real-time news quickly, although its reliability and credibility are sometimes questionable. The popularity of the Internet for news has led to the traditional media setting up online versions of their publications that offer the latest news. In addition, there has also been a convergence between the Internet and radio broadcasting following the loosening of government control like ending the requirement for all radio stations to carry the official *Radio Republik Indonesia* news relays¹¹⁴. Local radio stations downloaded news dispatches from a radio news service website and presented them in their own style, and set up their own websites to put up their news, all supporting an environment of a free flow of information. One successful example of this use of the Internet for radio broadcast is the Radio 68H network which started in 1999 to send news dispatches to other radio stations throughout Indonesia in its network¹¹⁵. Radio 68H, with over 60 stations broadcasting its programmes, is a creative innovation in overcoming the barriers of geography and is aimed at facilitating information exchange between the different provinces in Indonesia.

7 Second, the Internet has served as a new form of political discourse, interaction and political mobilisation. Even during the politically restrictive days of Soeharto when the

York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 23.

¹¹⁴ Santoso, "Radio waves in cyberspace", *Inside Indonesia*, Apr-Jun 00, available from <http://www.insideindonesia.org>.

¹¹⁵ The Radio 68H network subsequently switched to using the satellite to distribute its programmes in 2000. See Santoso, "Exchanging News, Bridging Isolation", *Inside Indonesia*, Oct-Dec 2002, available at

press was under heavy government control, a thriving virtual community of anti-government critics and banned publications like *Tempo* appeared on the Internet. In the era of reform (*reformasi*), the students were the moving force on the streets and on the Internet. The student websites and other websites hosted discussion forums, information and news on factual events, and served as a tool for communication for the student demonstrations¹¹⁶. The student websites have demonstrated the usefulness and potential of the Internet for political mobilisation and has paved the way for the political parties to set up their homepages in time for the first free and fair general elections in 32 years in 1999. Independent websites set up by election monitors tracked the results of the 1999 general elections, helping to ensure greater transparency in the process. Presidential hopefuls like Chairman of the Consultative Assembly Amien Rais and incumbent President Megawati have set up their own websites, with an eye on the Presidential election in 2004. The Internet thus has played a role in the democratic process in Indonesia.

8 Third, the Internet has provided the NGO community and marginal groups in society a platform to publicise their cause and network amongst themselves and their supporters. It has levelled the playing field for these groups vis-à-vis the authorities. The Internet has been crucial to the struggle for East Timor's freedom; it facilitated the dissemination of information and action options especially to the Western world. This function will remain crucial when East Timor fades from the focus of international attention following its independence in 2002. During the lead-up to the 1999 East Timor referendum, pro-East Timor groups launched a cyberwar against Indonesia and even hacked into the homepage

<http://www.insideindonesia.org>.

¹¹⁶ Waruno Mahdi, "Indonesian democracy on the Internet – some interesting places and things to do for those who know a little Indonesian", *Inside Indonesia*, April-June 1999, available from <http://www.insideindonesia.org>.

of the Department of Foreign Affairs¹¹⁷. The separatist Free Papua Movement (OPM), Acehese dissidents, and other human rights groups have maintain websites publicising their cause and the situation in Irian Jaya and Aceh, respectively¹¹⁸. Environmental groups have also harnessed the Internet's potential in spreading their message¹¹⁹. Peace movements have taken advantage of the global reach of the Internet in rallying public opinion, especially in the ethnic-torn troubled spots in Indonesia. Most of these websites have been set up by foreign and international organisations¹²⁰.

9 Fourth, e-government has reached Indonesia. The government has realised the potential of the Internet and since last year, most government ministries and departments have set up their own websites. Many of these contain information content and do not yet provide real services, but the prospects are encouraging. The Internet could play a constructive role in changing the international image of Indonesia and diplomacy. The Department of Defence website contains its version of controversial events to counter the negative media portrayal of the military, eg in the controversial incidents like the Trisakti shootings of student demonstrators, the May 1998 riots, atrocities committed by the military in East Timor, and other human rights abuses in Irian Jaya and Aceh. The Internet has transformed diplomacy - unlike the traditional diplomacy of the past, the Department of Foreign Affairs is now engaged in public diplomacy on the Internet, which I shall term e-diplomacy. The Internet serves as a useful channel to reach out to the global audience in countering the negative news coverage of Indonesia in the international media. Other

¹¹⁷ "East Timor cyberwar on new global battlefield: the web", *The Jakarta Post*, 27 Aug 99; available from <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

¹¹⁸ Ed Aspinall and Iain Wilson, "Indonesia on the Net: Resources in two troubled regions – Aceh and Irian Jaya", in *Inside Indonesia*, Oct-Dec 1999; available from <http://www.insideindonesia.org>.

¹¹⁹ Ed Colijn, "Indonesia on the Net", in *Inside Indonesia*, Jul-Sep 98; available from <http://www.insideindonesia.org>.

¹²⁰ Jane McGrory, "Peace on the net", in *Inside Indonesia*, Apr-Jun 02; available from

ministries especially the economic ones post government regulations and policies, and advertise investment opportunities online. The official websites also allows for public interaction with government officials and legislators. For instance, the websites of both the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) and the House of Representatives (DPR) have recently launched their homepages which contain an online forum and allows the public to air their views on legislative issues. These have encouraged greater transparency in governance and contributes towards greater public participation in public policy and debate, as well as provide better service to the public. In Indonesia, e-governance could also contribute positively towards the regional autonomy initiative, play a role in helping to narrow the digital divide across the Indonesian archipelago, and strengthen community and national development. Many regional governments have taken up the initiative to launch e-government, in fact the first e-government project in the region was started in South Sulawesi¹²¹.

Prospects for the future

10 The Internet in Indonesia is still at a relatively infant stage. Its development has slowed down in recent years, thereby raising doubts whether Internet development is viable. The growth in the number of Internet users has slowed down after doubling every year for the past three years, to only 5 million in 2002 which is a slight increase from 4.2 million in 2001¹²². An indication of this slowdown is the slowdown in the *warung internet* business evidenced in the decline of these Internet cafes from 6,000 in 1999 to 2,500 in 2001. One of the factors for the slowdown in the Internet development is the limited base

<http://www.insideindonesia.org>.

¹²¹ Zlati Arbi, "What is meant by e-government?", *The Jakarta Post*, 1 Apr 01, available from <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

¹²² Fitri Wulandari, "Growth of Internet users slowing down", *The Jakarta Post*, 22 Oct 02, available from <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

of computer-literate population in Indonesia. Despite the country's total population of 210 million, only three to four million Indonesians have post-secondary education¹²³. Moreover, the main users of the Internet are urban office workers and students but this market is already saturated¹²⁴. Furthermore, there has been little effort by the government and industry players to introduce the Internet to a wider market; only a quarter of the 4.2 million Internet users are active daily users. Moreover, unlike the traditional print news media, the online news media is still immature and people are unfamiliar with this form of media¹²⁵. A survey revealed that most users, mainly between 20-30 years of age, used the Internet for emailing and chatting while only a minority used it for information or news¹²⁶. This does not bode well for the prospect of the Internet as a tool for political communication and e-democracy.

11 The lack of government support for the Internet's development is another factor for its slowdown in growth. Although the government has stated its commitment and undertaken initiatives to lift the Indonesian people into cyberspace, it has been the private sector investment and sponsorship that have sustained the Internet in Indonesia¹²⁷. The sluggish economy since the onslaught of the economic and financial crisis in 1997, coupled with the dotcom collapse, has not been conducive for the development of the Internet. Funding assistance from Japan to finance a government plan to establish 500,000 *warung internet* by 2004 had been cancelled with the global recession¹²⁸. Some government

¹²³ "Exploring the possibilities of over 20 million online", *The Jakarta Post*, 6 Nov 00, available from <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Fitri Wulandari, "Internet news portals eye expansion after gloom", *The Jakarta Post*, 14 Nov 02, available from <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

¹²⁶ "Internet still a source of fun", *The Jakarta Post*, 23 May 02, available from <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

¹²⁷ Purbo, 2002.

¹²⁸ Fitri Wulandari, "Internet kiosks losing business", *The Jakarta Post*, 28 Oct 02, available from <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

initiatives had failed to have a direct impact on the people. For example, the Information Infrastructure Development Programme was underwritten by a World Bank loan but most of the funds were used to pay international consultants instead of investment in infrastructure. Moreover, the government's pre-occupation with the country's larger political and economic problems have diverted attention away from active support or promotion of the Internet.

12 Indonesia's poor infrastructure is another obstacle to the development of the Internet. While countries are talking about a digital divide, Indonesia is still crossing the "telephone divide" between the developed and least developed regions, principally between Java and the Outer Islands¹²⁹. The telephone density in the population of 210 million is only 3 per 100 persons. The government's effort at increasing the number of telephone lines to 11 million by 2000 failed following the suspension of several telecommunications projects with the economic crisis¹³⁰. Besides the poor telecommunications infrastructure, the rising costs have reduced the public's interest in the Internet¹³¹. The state-owned telecommunications company increased telephone charges by 17.9% in 2002 as part of the government's three-year plan to increase charges by 45.49% in a bid to help attract new investments in the fixed-line telecommunications sector. The two telecommunications giants Telkom and Indosat have tried to use their market power to distort the industry by overcharging ISPs for incoming call lines and frequently rejected applications for new telephone lines¹³².

¹²⁹ Hendarsyah Tarmizi, "Still long way to go to bridge digital divide", *The Jakarta Post*, 17 May 02, available from <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Fitri Wulandari, "Growth of Internet users slowing down", *The Jakarta Post*, 22 Oct 02, available from <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

13 The problems of low Internet use, and poor infrastructure could be overcome with creative solutions like wireless LAN communication infrastructure, a bandwidth sharing scheme for the *warung internet* thus reducing the cost of satellite access, and education and promotion of the benefits of the Internet to the public¹³³. Through these solutions, the Internet can become more accessible to a wider range of people, benefiting small and medium enterprises and schools. A potential 20 million Indonesians could then access the Internet by 2004¹³⁴. These estimates are not far off the mark as many *warung internet* in Bandung, Yogyakarta, Malang and Surabaya have already implemented the bandwidth sharing scheme and eventually build their own wireless network¹³⁵. The gradual liberalisation of the telecommunications sector would eventually cut the cost of telecommunications and this would boost the number of Internet users and broaden the market for the Internet industry¹³⁶.

14 For the Internet news media, most are money-losing ventures, just like many around the world. According to Endy Bayuni, Deputy Chief Editor of The Jakarta Post, “the jury is still out on whether the Internet will be the main medium to disseminate news, until we find a way of making them profitable”¹³⁷. Bayuni stated that while the news media industry is certainly expanding its reach through the Internet but its sustainability is still a question. He said that many news websites have now scaled down their operation (but not close them down entirely) while trying to figure out a way of making money from the Internet.

¹³² Purbo, 2002.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ “Exploring the possibilities of over 20 million online”, *The Jakarta Post*, 6 Nov 00, available from <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Moch. N. Kurniawan, “Internet industry hit hard last year”, *The Jakarta Post*, 4 Jan 02, available from <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

15 The Internet has revolutionised Indonesia just as it has elsewhere. Despite the current slowdown in its development, its future prospects are promising. The Internet industry players must work in conjunction with the government to overcome these obstacles. The government's support and commitment to Internet development is the key. The Internet provides huge potential opportunities for the government, political parties, NGOs, civil society, and individuals to tap. There are huge political, social and economic benefits to be gained for society. The Internet should be encouraged and developed in order to bring Indonesia on par with the rest of the wired and globalised world.

¹³⁷ Endy Bayuni, personal communication, April 2003.

Chapter V

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS?

1 The way in which the media functions as the “connective tissue” linking the government to its citizens can affect the nature of politics, the accountability of politicians to the public, and the quality of democracy¹³⁸. A media that is supportive of democracy is one that is independent, financially viable, has diverse and plural voices, and serves the public interest¹³⁹. This chapter highlights the issues in media development in Indonesia today, including the fundamental question of press freedom. Recent developments in the media have raised questions on whether press freedom is viable in Indonesia or if there is indeed genuine press freedom in Indonesia. Freedom of the press needs to be understood broadly as “a practical right to access information, to ask questions and to publicise complex and confronting issues; it is not just freedom from being banned”¹⁴⁰. Two alternatives to the current media model in Indonesia are suggested. However, the case for Asian values journalism as a solution to the problems in today’s press may not be the answer although it offers some useful elements that could be adopted by the Indonesian media. The alternative media is another possibility to achieve wider and free access to the press.

Media issues today

2 Four years after the Indonesian media gained its freedom from the shackles of authoritarian rule, the question of press freedom remains in Indonesia. The question now

¹³⁸ Gunther and Mughan, p420.

¹³⁹ Center for Democracy and Governance, p 3.

¹⁴⁰ Kitley, pg 268.

asked is if press freedom has indeed liberated the media community in Indonesia¹⁴¹. There is a growing sense of disappointment in the present government with the liberal press. Like her predecessor, President Megawati has criticised the media over biased and irresponsible reporting. Recent statements made by the government criticising the media for the abuse of its freedom and that it was considering ways of reining in an “out of control” press¹⁴² have raised the spectre of a return of press censorship and government control. The government’s refusal to renew the work visa of an Australia journalist based in Jakarta allegedly over his negative reports on human rights issues has heightened fears of a renewed government crackdown on the press. There have been suggestions by the government and parliament to revise the 1999 Press Law, including strengthening it to include elements from the Criminal Code to curb what the government calls irresponsible reporting¹⁴³. Meanwhile, the public has grown disillusioned with the irresponsible press and have increasingly perceived that the media as having too much freedom that it has lost its focus¹⁴⁴.

3 The media is still not free from pressure from interest groups. These groups use intimidation tactics to pressure the media over unfavourable reports. In 2000, supporters of then President Abdulrahman Wahid ransacked the office of *Jawa Pos* in Surabaya for reporting on collusion and corruption in the Nadhlatul Ulama religious organisation once

¹⁴¹ “RI’s frail press freedom”, The Jakarta Post, 5 Sep 02, available at

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20020905.Eo2>.

¹⁴² “Mega raps media over ‘biased’ reporting on floods”, The Jakarta Post, 2 Feb 02, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20020202.A03>, and “Indonesian minister ponders new ways to rein in media”, The Jakarta Post, 29 Dec 01,

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20011229.A01>.

¹⁴³ Ati Nurbaiti, “Press faces growing threats to its freedom”, *The Jakarta Post*, 15 Feb 02,

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=200215.C03>.

¹⁴⁴ Dewi Anggraeni, “The need to regain trust in Indonesian press despite freedom”, *The Jakarta Post*, 15 Feb 02, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20020119.D02>.

headed by Wahid¹⁴⁵, and forced the paper to issue a public apology and make a voluntary contribution to the organisation. Many other newspapers have been subject to mob violence. The Alliance of Independent Journalists recorded that 47 out of 104 cases of threats against press freedom involved mob violence in 2000-2001¹⁴⁶. Furthermore, regional violence still obstruct a full-fledged free press, especially in provinces like Aceh, Maluku, and Irian Jaya¹⁴⁷. Mob violence and intimidation reflects a level of public immaturity and understanding on press freedom. At the larger level, it also reflects the general lack of respect for and faith in the law-enforcement agencies and legal system, and the rule of law and order in Indonesian society today. Societal groups would rather take the law in their own hands than submit to the legal process which they find dissatisfactory. The lack of respect for the rule of law thus weakens the freedom of the press¹⁴⁸. 90% of the 70 cases of intimidation and violence against the press were reported to the police but there was hardly any follow-up¹⁴⁹. The lack of penalties and law enforcement only encourages those who are offended by the press to resort to violent means to express their displeasure. The most recent case of violence against journalists was the attack at *Tempo*'s office by 200 thugs following the magazine's publication of an article in its March 3 2003 edition insinuating criminal activity involving businessman Tony Winarta¹⁵⁰.

4 The media is also not free from police abuse and violence. The frequent cases of

¹⁴⁵ Berni K. Moestafa, "Media criticised for bowing to threats, pressure", *The Jakarta Post*, 16 Aug 02, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20020816.C03>.

¹⁴⁶ Muninnggar Sri Saraswati, "'Tempo' attack won't be the last, observer warns", *The Jakarta Post*, 10 Mar 03, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

¹⁴⁷ Aaron Goodman, "Indonesia media suffer growing pains", *UBC Journalism Review Thunderbird Online Magazine*, available at <http://www.journalism.ubc.ca/thunderbird/2000-01/october/indonesia.html>.

¹⁴⁸ Fabiola Desy, Unidjaja & Leo Wahyudi S., "Civil society can be a threat to freedom of the press", *The Jakarta Post*, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20020327.G04>.

¹⁴⁹ Solahudin, "Violence against media: another 'dictator' is here", *The Jakarta Post*, 11 March 2003, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20030311.Eo2>.

¹⁵⁰ Endy Bayuni, "An attack on 'Tempo' is an assault on our freedom", *The Jakarta Post*, 12 Mar 03,

violence and intimidation against journalists by police officers in Indonesia reflect the lack of understanding of and respect for the freedom of the press. According to the Alliance of Independent Journalists, there were 95 cases of physical assault on journalists from in 2001¹⁵¹. The police brutality reflect the old security-approach taken by the security forces in handling issues and show the lack of official support for the freedom of the press. So far, it has been reported that only one case of police assault on journalists was brought to justice. Intimidation of journalists eventually hurts not only press freedom and the freedom of expression but also the public's right to information as such violence against the media leads to self-censorship which in turn results in distorted reports hiding possibly vital information, and weakening the media's role as a public watchdog¹⁵².

5 The Indonesian media is not free from legal pressure and threats. There are some nine state laws that could threaten freedom of the press and freedom of information. These are laws relating to broadcasting, consumer rights, companies, bankruptcy, state emergency powers, advertising, and state secrets¹⁵³. The media is also subject to slander and libel laws under the harsh criminal code. There have been cases of military generals filing legal charges against the media for slander and libel over their reports on the country's internal conflicts. These threats of legal action could be seen as a new form of official coercion and intimidation of the media and does not bode well for its sustained freedom. At the same time, the irresponsible and careless reporting has given the free press a bad name and threatens its very viability. Recently, President Megawati stated her

available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com>.

¹⁵¹ Viva Goldner, "Indonesia media under fire for bias, corruption", *The Jakarta Post*, 10 Feb 02, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20020210.A02..>

¹⁵² Solahudin.

¹⁵³ Badri Jawara, "Press freedom 'still under threat'", *The Jakarta Post*, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20020723.S06>.

intention to file a lawsuit against *Rakyat Merdeka* for an offensive headline¹⁵⁴. The action of some irresponsible members of the media have given politicians an excuse to take systematic efforts to again muzzle the press. For instance, there have been calls by the government and some legislators to revise the 1999 Press Law and insert clauses from the Criminal Law so as to give the Press Law more teeth.

6 Besides the external threats to press freedom, many of the problems that threaten the viability of the free press in Indonesia today are internal. The main threat to press freedom is no longer government control and censorship but the tightness of competition, sensational journalism, and low level of professional ethics¹⁵⁵. There have been many public and official complaints of a lack of professionalism in the media. Much of the biased reporting and misinformation is due to the quality of journalism and poor sense of professionalism among many journalists today¹⁵⁶. The lack of proper journalistic training and education in general results in poor quality journalism and professional standards. Moreover, the fierce competition for news means that journalists are under time constraints and pressure and frequently do not verify their sources and information before publication. This irresponsible journalism reflects the lack of ethics among many journalists in Indonesia. Many do not even know the existence of the Journalist Code of Ethics¹⁵⁷. The lack of professionalism amongst journalist is also manifested in the form of corruption. Government officials and private companies still continue the Soeharto-era practice of giving journalists envelopes stuffed with money in return for positive coverage. The

¹⁵⁴ “Cannibal headline: Mega to sue paper”, *The Straits Times*, 23 Mar 03, available at <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg>.

¹⁵⁵ Lukas Luwarso, “The paradox of freedom in SE Asia”, Southeast Asian Press Association, May 3, 2000, available at <http://www.seapa.org/column/se/5032000.html>.

¹⁵⁶ Claire Harvey, “World Press Freedom Day 2002: The face of RI media”, *The Jakarta Post*, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20020503.B11>.

¹⁵⁷ Goldner.

“envelope culture” still persists today partly due to the low wages paid to journalists, forcing them to seek extra income, and the attitudes of government officials. It is estimated that about 80% of journalists in Indonesia still accept envelopes¹⁵⁸. The “envelope culture” threatens the integrity of the press and leads to biased and misleading coverage.

7 Irresponsible press and the inferior quality and standards in the media are reflected in “yellow journalism” and sensationalist reporting. Many of the new publications that have emerged from the era of press freedom are politically-oriented weekly tabloids, available at a cheap price, which claim to report the “news behind the news”, full scenarios and conspiracy theories, and contain sensational language, accusations and counter-accusations¹⁵⁹. The media has also been accused of blowing up rumours, irrational and superstitious fears among the public and resorting to showing graphic scenes of violence¹⁶⁰. The credibility of the mass media is being undermined by sensationalist journalism. Some media have abused the press freedom and have produced publications and programmes verging on pornography. A minority in the press are damaging the reputation of the entire media sector and endangering the continued freedom of the press. The government’s response has led to fears among many in the media circle that this would give an excuse for the authorities to clamp down on the free press¹⁶¹.

8 Indonesia’s prolonged economic crisis have forced many media companies into bankruptcy, due to the poor advertisement market which the media depend on for revenue,

¹⁵⁸ “Southeast Asia’s press is under pressure”, *The New York Times*, 14 Apr 02, available at http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?_m=3d868272fc7d037a621c26fb1715e4.

¹⁵⁹ John Olle, “Sex, money, power”, *Inside Indonesia*, No. 61, Jan-Mar 2000, available at <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edit60/jolle1.htm>.

¹⁶⁰ “Media body calls local news ‘vulgar’”, *The Jakarta Post*, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20020907.C16>.

¹⁶¹ Yogita Tahliramani, “Government warns media over pornography”, *The Jakarta Post*, 14 Mar 02, available

intense competition among rivals, and rising costs of operation. The print media, which relies mainly on advertisements for their revenue, has faced serious competition for advertisement spending from the television stations¹⁶². In turn, within the broadcast industry, the state-owned stations have fared worse than the private stations. The recently-corporatised TVRI is the latest victim of financial circumstances. Since the government ended corporatised the station in 2003 and effectively ending state subsidies, many of its 23 stations across the country have ended transmission, depriving many people in the outlying regions access to television as it is usually the only television station available in some places¹⁶³. Furthermore, the poor economic conditions result in compromise on journalism standards as undertrained and underqualified journalists are employed at low wages to save costs. However, the tight competition among media players in a severe economic situation means that only the best will survive. It could be seen as a process of a more selective public weeding out the bad media¹⁶⁴. This will also help to improve the quality of the media in the long run. Market forces could be considered a means of self-regulation for the press.

Asian values journalism

9 The chaos created by press freedom in Indonesia since 1999 have led to various efforts taken by the press community and society to improve the quality of the media. The question that comes immediately to mind is whether Western-style press freedom may not be suitable in Indonesia afterall, especially in the context of its current political, economic

at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20020314.@04>.

¹⁶² Berni K. Moestafa, "Gray days for RI's colorful print media", *The Jakarta Post*, 9 Feb 03, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20030209.@01>.

¹⁶³ Devi Asmarani, "Plug pulled on Medan TV station", *The Straits Times*, 9 April 2003, available at <http://www.straitstimes.com>.

¹⁶⁴ Tertiani ZB Simanjuntak, "Readers become more selective, market tests media survival", *The Jakarta Post*, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20020517.C03>, and "Banning porn

and social crises. An issue worth looking at is the concept of Asian values in journalism. Asian values in journalism include the following ethics: (a) press freedom with responsibility - preserve communal harmony and national unity by reporting with sensitivity and responsibility, avoiding sensational and provocative terms and information, de-emphasise conflict and showing respect for national leaders; (b) development journalism - help promote political and social stability for economic development; and (c) close press-state relationship – support government’s efforts in nation-building¹⁶⁵. On media censorship, for example, proponents of Asian values argue that they place greater priority to the good of the community over the individuals, peace and stability over chaos and anarchy which an uncontrolled media could cause.

10 But the question of whether Asian journalism is shaped by Asian values is itself without a clear answer¹⁶⁶. Opponents of the concept argue that there are no universal Asian values to begin with, nor a single version of uniquely Asian journalism¹⁶⁷. Moreover, it is argued that journalism everywhere share a professional ethic. According to Endy Bayuni¹⁶⁸, Deputy Chief Editor of *The Jakarta Post*, Asian values are rarely spoken about anymore in Indonesia. Many in civil society, including journalists, see the Asian values debate as more a cover for the Soeharto regime to justify authoritarian rule. The concept of Asian values, because of its association with the Soeharto regime, has become a “dirty” term in Indonesia that is no longer discussed. Bayuni now believes that there is in fact nothing that distinguishes between a so-called Asian values journalism model and a

curtails freedom of expression”, *The Jakarta Post*, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=19990916.C03>.

¹⁶⁵ Brian L. Massey and Li-jing Arthur Chang, “Locating Asian Values in Asian journalism: A content analysis of web newspapers”, *Journal of Communication*, Dec 2002, pp 989-990.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p 987.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p991.

¹⁶⁸ In 1996, Endy Bayuni was one of those who believed that Asian journalists have a value system that is

Western journalism model, for even in the Western world, there are different systems and laws regulating the media. Bayuni stressed that the media essentially must observe some universal principles of journalism including accuracy, fairness, balanced reporting, etc that essentially will help to make them more professional. The media professionals are concerned about strengthening the media industry. They are wary of those who would jump at the opportunity to discredit the present press system/model and campaign to restore some form of government control over the media. Those against the free press might not use Asian values in their argument but they could find another term less sensitive that would not invoke old memories of the Soeharto regime.

11 However, according to Bayuni, the rejection of Asian values journalism does not mean that the media industry is not concerned about some of the negative aspects of the free press that is seen now in Indonesia, especially abuses of the freedom by some members of the media. He acknowledged that there have been many cases of poor reporting or misreporting even by respected media organisations, and cases of media sensationalism, but argues that these problems should be dealt mostly through legal channels where there are sufficient laws in place to punish the guilty. For example, those who obstruct the journalist's work could be dealt with under the 1999 Press Law, pornography under the criminal code, and character assassination under the libel laws. Moreover, there is also the journalistic code of ethics to which professional journalists must abide, and media watchdogs whose job it is to make sure that the media observe these ethics. Some other problems faced by the media could be dealt with by improving the skills and professionalism of the journalists. In effect, this is a call for greater responsibility in journalism, one of the elements of Asian values journalism.

different from those of their Western counterparts.

Alternative media

12 Another issue confronting the Indonesian media is access to the press. Norris (2001) theorises that a free press can strengthen democracy and promote development under two conditions: (a) where channels of mass communications are free and independent of established interests; and (b) where there is widespread public access to these media. Freedom of the press by itself is insufficient to guarantee positive development if disadvantaged and marginal groups are excluded from the information resources provided by the mass media, whereas greater levels of access to news means greater potential for media impact¹⁶⁹. Neither conditions have been met in Indonesia.

13 Frustrated with the lack of access to and the current coverage by the mainstream press, some civil society groups have established their own independent media to disseminate information on their respective causes. Their aim is to educate the public and empower the minority groups on such issues as gender equality, environment, social injustice and political dissent. Such alternative press have their roots during the Soeharto years after the ban on three publications *Tempo*, *DeTIK* and *Editor* in 1994¹⁷⁰. When mainstream print media was subject to government restrictions, the alternative press emerged to meet the demand for news. The alternative press or underground media came about with dissatisfaction with the mainstream media and a rejection of the centralised power that produced it; it became the voice of dissent. Today, the alternative media provides the outlet for radical ideas and addresses issues not touched in the mainstream media¹⁷¹. It is totally independent, non-profit, and adopts a public service mission. Their

¹⁶⁹ Norris, pg 6.

¹⁷⁰ Stanley, "Alternative press challenges information blockade", *Inside Indonesia*, Edition No. 48, available at <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edit48/stanley.htm>.

¹⁷¹ Alexandra Crosby, "Do-it-yourself freedom", *Inside Indonesia*, April-June 2002, available at <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edit70/Sasha.htm>.

publications are usually made on photocopies or printed on recycled paper. Through their publications and activities, for example, art displays, public discussions and exhibitions, these alternative media attempts to widen the space for democratic discourse. One of the most successful alternative media in its time was *Tempo Interactive*, which was the online version of the banned *Tempo* magazine. It reverted to the mainstream media in 1998.

14 Despite the free press and open environment today, the alternative media still has its place in Indonesian society. It complements the mainstream media in the coverage of issues of concern to the community that the media ignores. Its wide grassroots reach, coverage of marginalised issues, and independent ownership makes it a genuinely free press. The alternative media also empowers the individual and minority groups to participate in democracy and public decision-making. This should be encouraged.

Chapter VI

LESSONS LEARNED

1 Four years have passed since the new Press Laws of 1999 were passed that guaranteed press freedom in Indonesia. Yet the press are still tackling the problems and issues. While the press have grown in recent years, in terms of new newspapers published and television and radio stations set up, the growth in quantity has not been matched by an increase in quality of journalism. Like many other countries in transition¹⁷², the political opening, in general, and the freeing up of the press, in particular, led to euphoria amongst the civil society. This was seen in the establishment of hundreds of new political parties, and intense politicking and jockeying for power¹⁷³. The press became the battleground and weapon for these political tussles. In some instances, the press became a player in the political game as well. These developments are taking place at a time when Indonesia is still in an economic recession following the 1997 currency and financial crisis. Ethnic strife, regional separatist insurgencies and terrorism threatens to tear the country apart even as it attempts to steady itself following the political and economic crises. Indonesia is still undergoing transition; its political structures and institutions, economic system, the legal and judicial system, the security apparatus, the press and mass media are all undergoing reform. Amidst the current developments, it is tempting to blame the free press as an obstacle to democracy and development, for exacerbating the crises faced by Indonesia rather than playing a constructive role in rebuilding the country.

¹⁷² See for example, Peter Gross, *Mass Media in Revolution and National Development – The Romanian Laboratory* (Ames: Iowa State University Press), 1996.

¹⁷³ In the short period of period 1998-2001, there have been three Presidents in power. Each presidency has had to face fierce criticism from the political opponents and challengers. Two have already fallen victim to such intense jockeying for power.

2 The Indonesian case in the development of the press has implications for other societies in transition. It would be useful to take stock of the lessons learned in the Indonesian media experience and see how it could be improved. This study on the development of the mass media in post-Soeharto Indonesia aims to present useful lessons to other societies making the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. Many of the lessons learned appear to be similar to those seen in other transitional societies¹⁷⁴ but with some local variations. However, no two societies are identical, and what applies to Indonesia may not be relevant to other countries, and vice versa. These lessons, in general, would be useful for the policy-maker, civil society groups and donor agencies involved in assisting the development of a free press in Indonesia.

Lessons learned

(a) Partisan press and pluralism of opinions may not be helpful to political and economic stability and the development of democracy

The free press environment was a consequence of and reflected the political openness in Indonesia. Hundreds of new political parties were established and there was intense jockeying for power in the newly liberated environment. This political competition was played out in the media. In some cases, some in the press have not been neutral observers but active participants in the political competition or were used by political players to further their own interests. The pluralism of opinions, especially by politicians, political commentators and political opponents, was made possible by the rapid growth of news and media sources and outlets. This is healthy for the democratic process and political discourse. But it did not help if the information provided in the media were not accurate or were merely political rhetoric or politically motivated. Worst, the population is still poorly

¹⁷⁴ See, for example, Gross, 1996.

educated to be able to grasp the messages put out in the press and could be easily influenced by the reports. Furthermore, by emphasising the divisions in opinion and views, the press has failed to offer accurate information to the electorate, especially those who are not highly educated and who are not yet socialised to democracy. A senior Indonesian journalist contended that “many Indonesian journalists still can’t distinguish between fact and fiction, news and opinion, information and rumour”¹⁷⁵. Consequently, this did not aid the political education and socialisation of the masses, and it inadvertently deepened the political crisis. Furthermore, a senior journalist acknowledged that the media in Indonesia are not united, each member of the press has a different agenda about how to proceed with political and economic reforms. Given this situation in the media itself, and the environment of intense political conflict, it is difficult for the media to play a role in helping to bring about a national consensus in consolidating democracy and reform. Here, the plural press could play a positive role in improving the quality of democracy and guide the reform process by avoiding partisan bias in reporting the news, and disseminating policy-relevant information to the public. To improve the quality of the media reporting, the press should adopt a style of journalism that provide more insight and background of current issues, and explain their processes to its readers instead of just reporting the facts and opinions expressed.

(b) Quality not quantity

The free press environment in Indonesia led to a flood of new publications, online news websites, television and radio stations to quench the insatiable thirst for news and information. But the plethora of news media products did not mean a better-informed citizenry for democracy. Instead, the press coverage created a sense of prolonged crisis in

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in Damien Kingsbury, pg 142.

the country. This was partly due to the flood of information and opinions expressed in the media and provocative headlines in the press. A media observer blamed the media for replying too much on statements made by politicians without adding meaning to them¹⁷⁶. These merely contributed to a perception of a chaotic situation. Poor quality journalism may even cause the public to lose interest and confidence in reform and democracy. The press should instead focus on providing greater insight and relevant information to the public and win back the public trust, and guide the reform effort back on track.

(c) New technology may not improve quality of journalism

The Internet has widened the possibilities and sources for news gathering and dissemination. However, this does not mean that there are more and credible information out there. The reverse may in fact be true. Due to the demand for real-time news and fierce competition, online journalists work under extra pressure and inaccuracies are common. The press industry also suffers a lack of suitably qualified journalists who are often underpaid, compromising on professional standards. The industry and NGOs providing assistance in media development programmes should focus on improving the quality of journalists. The principal need of the Indonesian press is not new technology but better human resources. Press associations and journalist schools could focus on improving the education and training of journalists.

(d) Reform needed in other institutions, not only in media

The press cannot be totally blamed for the failure to provide information and educate the electorate. Issues and problems faced in the press today are symptomatic of the problems faced in Indonesian society as a whole. Indonesia faces a crisis of values today. The end of

¹⁷⁶ Gross, 1996.

32 years of authoritarian rule has left a huge void in Indonesian society that must be filled by reformed institutions and systems. The legal and judicial system need to be reformed and laws need to be enforced and the rule of law upheld. Corruption, collusion and nepotism (*KKN – korupsi, kolusi, nepotisme*) must be rooted out. The public's respect for those in authority, including the law-enforcement institutions must be restored, if not, then at least earned. Without legal reform and enforcement of the law, the press will continue to be subjected to intimidation and violence by those offended by their reports. Libel laws and where applicable, criminal laws, must be fairly and equally enforced to deal with irresponsible press rather than a wholesale application of censorship on the entire press. Press reform alone will not solve the problems faced by the industry but must be supported by a strong legal framework. A free press can only properly function in a mature and developed society governed by the rule of law. The contextual factors such as legal system and political will in the government and civil society, professional media bodies, independent press monitors, and the readership all provide a supportive and enabling environment to support press freedom.

(e) Journalistic values and ethics must be upheld

An important variable in the free press in a democracy is the set of norms and ethics that governs journalists. Members of the press must adhere to professional journalistic ethics and the journalist associations have the responsibility to sanction their members for violation of the journalistic code of ethics. It is important to safeguard journalistic ethics because “journalism is not based on intrinsic ideas in developing countries, a crisis within the media system easily translates into total chaos in which not only jobs and

organisations, but also basic journalistic values and ethical standards are damaged”¹⁷⁷. An erosion of values and standards in developing countries frequently results in an irrecoverable breakdown of the institutions of free press for a much longer time than in advanced countries¹⁷⁸. Journalistic values and ethics should be upheld by not only the junior reporter but also senior editors who have power to slant the editorial content and headlines. In the euphoria of press freedom, the press should not forget its public service ethos, that its primary role is to disseminate unbiased, non-partisan news and an adequate amount of policy-relevant information to the public.

(f) Over-aggressive watchdog role of the press

The newly freed press has moved from one extreme to the other in its euphoria of freedom. After coming out of a period of tight government control and censorship, it now sees itself as the Fourth Estate and defines its role as a watchdog of the government. It appears that emphasis is placed on its “check-and-balance” role of keeping the government accountable for its action instead of its primary role to inform the people. The press has become hyper-critical of the government and its policies. This has important implications for public policy. The attitude of the media has generated an adversarial relationship between the government and press, and fosters public cynicism of the government. This makes the government’s job more difficult especially when it has to implement unpopular but necessary public policies such as the proposed price hike in December 2002¹⁷⁹. Incessant and unwarranted drumbeat of negativism can undermine trust in government and support

¹⁷⁷ Jae-kyoung Lee, “The Asian financial crisis and the tribulations of the South Korean Media”, *The International Journal for Communication Studies*, vol 64(3), 2002, pg 295.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, pg 295.

¹⁷⁹ Public and media discontent over the government’s fuel price hike plans forced the government to overturn its policy just days after implementing it. The fuel price hike plan was part of the government’s budget-tightening measures to reform the economy.

for democratic institutions and practices¹⁸⁰. In Indonesia, with the opportunistic politicking by politicians in the run-up to the 2004 general and presidential elections, this constant media cynicism and irresponsible reporting could undermine the public support for the country's reform process and development efforts. There are already signs of growing public apathy toward reform in Indonesia as a result of irresponsible press¹⁸¹. While the press should play a counter-balance role to check abuse of government power and corruption etc, it should be moderate and responsible in carrying out its watchdog function. Investigative journalism in checking abuses of power and corruption are positive contributions of the media in preserving the integrity of democracy but a fine balance needs to be made between playing a responsible watchdog role and unwarranted criticism and cynicism towards the government and politics.

(g) Media self-regulation vs government imposition of control

As mentioned above, unwarranted criticism of the government has soured press-government relations, and has led to calls by the government for responsible journalism. There are suggestions about restoring government control over the media, or at least imposing some form of control. President Megawati and many politicians have been talking about the media going overboard with their freedom to the point of abusing it without being penalty. As Asian values journalism may no longer be used to justify government censorship, other terms could be used instead. Although there has been little public support for re-imposition of government control, a irresponsible press could become an excuse to take away the freedom of the press and free speech. The internal problems

¹⁸⁰ Richard Gunther and Anthony Mughan, *Democracy and the Media*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2000, pg 427.

¹⁸¹ A'an Suryana and Berni K. Moestafa, "Press and public go their separate ways after 1998", *The Jakarta Post*, 18 May 2002, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/Archives/ArchivesDet2.asp?FileID=20020518.A07>.

faced by the press today, such as sensationalist journalism, could be exploited by external parties as an excuse for criticising freedom of the press. This could easily find support from a public tired of a low quality and sensationalist press, or even suspicious as to the accuracy of the content. The press must guard against such attempts to censor the press or forcing self-censorship on the media, and prevent itself from degenerating into sensationalism that would make it lose support from the public. The press should set its own house in order, ensure adherence to the Journalistic Code of Ethics and let the National Press Council and the legal system deal with the errant press. Members of the press themselves must support and strengthen the role of the National Press Council, including giving financial contribution, in order for the latter to function effectively as an independent monitor and arbitrator between the public and the press. The press system should manage and self-regulate itself with its own ethics, norms, principles and guidelines, and not should not give the government an excuse to intervene and re-impose control.

(h) Western model of journalism may not be totally appropriate

It is assumed that the free press in Indonesia should adopt the so-called “Western” model of journalism. However, it may be the case that Indonesia lacks the social, cultural, political and/or economic conditions that are conducive for the “Western” press model. For instance, many regions in the country are still experiencing the throes of violent ethnic and separatist conflict. Such antagonistic relationship between media and the government – characteristic of a Western model of free press - may not be appropriate. On the other hand, the so-called Asian values journalism may also not be appropriate or acceptable in Indonesia today. Nevertheless, the Indonesian press could adopt some elements of the “Asian” model of journalism such as responsible journalism. Press freedom can only

function properly if the press is responsible in its reporting, and serves the public interest. At this time of transition, when the country has not fully recovered from the economic crisis and when political stability is still fragile, an adversarial style of Western journalism may not be appropriate. Instead, what is needed is a free yet responsible and professional press that can assist and guide the country towards the reform path and out of the crisis, and still go about with its independent watchdog role. The free press has a public service role to play in disseminating accurate and relevant information, and act as a mediator between the state and civil society. It needs to safeguard its freedom but exercise this responsibly to avoid a potential backlash from the public and government.

(i) Role of local/regional and alternative press

The local/regional press clearly have a role to play in regional affairs in the current implementation of regional autonomy laws in Indonesia. If democracy, press freedom and development were to become sustainable in the provinces, the local press can play a greater role in socialising their readers to build up the citizens' support for these institutions and systems. The local media, including local press and community radio, can act as an important tool for empowering the local community, and give them a voice in their own affairs, for example farmers' rights, and help build up a sense of community identity. It would also contribute towards increasing media literacy among the local population. Therefore attention should be paid to the development of the regional press while developing the national press system. At present, all community radio stations throughout Indonesia are illegal and all radio stations must apply for a license although most do not so¹⁸². The government should not merely close these stations on grounds of

¹⁸² Rebeccsa Henschke, "Power to the People", in *Inside Indonesia*, Oct-Dec 2002, available at <http://www.insideindonesia.org>.

competing allocation of radio frequencies or because of its potential to ignite ethnic and religious conflicts. The government should view these community radio stations and local press positively. They have immense influence in affecting regional ethnic and religious conflicts in strife-torn communities in Maluku, West Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi etc. TVRI still has a role to play in promoting national development, democracy and nationalism in the country as it is still the government's biggest communication channel with the population. Its local stations - many of which have closed down due to shortage of funding - which air their own news programmes, play an important function. These local press should go beyond just responsible journalism and reporting of facts, they should make a positive choice for peace by publicising and correcting the deep misconceptions that exist between the rival communities¹⁸³. In addition, the alternative press should not be suppressed but encouraged to flourish to fill the gaps left by the mainstream media in covering issues such as the environment, urban poverty, gender equality etc. Assistance by donor agencies could focus on the development of the alternative press as a means of empowering the marginalised members of society.

(j) Media literacy

Media literacy is a key factor in democratisation. It means understanding the meaning of what one sees or reads in the media, understanding the bias, omission, and subtlety, being able to interpret the information and present it to others¹⁸⁴. Media reform in Indonesia must factor in the low level of literacy among the population. A free press that functions properly in a democracy requires an audience that is literate enough to consume the news produced by the press so that the citizenry can make informed decisions. Media literacy is

¹⁸³ Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick, "Peace Journalism in Poso", *Inside Indonesia*, Oct-Dec 2002, available at <http://www.insideindonesia.org>.

¹⁸⁴ Johnston, p 30.

also built up by a free press that presents a wide array of views and opinions and explains the political issues of the day to the reader. It is almost hard to imagine how the common man-in-the-street could grasp complex political and economic issues discussed in the media. The press has to cater to the needs and demands of society, including socialising them to issues of concern to the country's development, including political and economic issues. The high turnover rate of new publications after 1998 reveals a search for an equilibrium in the press-audience relationship. However, the "serious" press mainly caters to the small group of educated elite in Indonesia, while the majority of the population which has only a low level of education still prefer the tabloid press. The largest circulating newspaper and firm favourite of the masses is *Pos Kota* which focuses on crime, sports, leisure, and entertainment news. Moreover, entertainment programmes (eg *sinetron* dramas) and crime news continue to dominate television programme content. While it would take a long time for the general population to attain a high level of literacy, the press could help in educating the public by customising its coverage of issues at a level easily understood by all. This could help empower the people and increase the public participation in the political discourse on the future of Indonesia's democracy and reform agenda.

(k) Assistance in media development

The Indonesian press would be well-served if it continues to receive assistance in training by foreign and local NGOs and aid agencies. At this early phase of the free press, Indonesia lacks a model to emulate for its development. Indonesia needs to develop its own indigenous concept of the press. Foreign assistance need to factor in the local political, economic and social conditions in customising development programmes while focusing on the fundamental elements of free press. Given the influence of the recent past,

it is very likely that the Indonesian press would reject suggestions for an Asian values journalism model or a national development model viewing these suspiciously as attempts to re-impose Soeharto-style control. Yet, the press industry should continue to search and define its role and philosophy; it cannot depend on outside assistance to provide one.

(I) Internet development

The Internet has hitherto been given insufficient attention. It has the potential to play a useful communications medium in the future. The authorities should start with addressing the media policy with regards to the Internet and broadcast regulations. These should be made clearer and less restrictive so as to enable the expansion of the Internet industry. The government should also explore further the application of the Internet for e-government and diplomacy. The use of the Internet as a tool of diplomacy - “e-diplomacy” - could enable Indonesia to reach out to the foreign public to present a more objective and favourable picture of the country’s situation and development. This is especially true in the light of last year’s terrorist attacks in Bali and the negative impact of years of political turmoil in the country. This could serve as a counterbalance to the negative image of Indonesia often portrayed in the international media.

Conclusion

3 A free and more open press in Indonesia certainly played a role in the breakdown of authoritarian rule, and heralded democratic progress in the country. It still has a role to play in the transition and development of Indonesia. The freeing of the press, and the new communications technology in the form of the Internet provided diverse sources of information. They also offered more opportunities for political discourse and greater

debate on economic policies. However, in this time of transition, the development of a free press in Indonesia that could support its nascent democracy and human and economic development needs careful and long-term cultivation. Continuous efforts need to be made by the media community and society to improve the quality and professionalism in the media. The media, NGOs and other civil society groups have a role to play in continuing to pressure the government to keep the media environment free. Support for the media development is a key to the overall efforts to develop good governance, democracy, and rule of law and human rights¹⁸⁵. Likewise, media reform and responsible journalism can only take root in Indonesia if the judicial, law enforcement, bureaucratic and political institutions have undergone reform to rid themselves of old corrupt practices. Finally, a media that is supportive of democracy is one that is independent, financially viable and serves the public interest. It requires journalists who are responsible in their reporting, and uphold strong journalistic ethics and are free from corruption and intimidation.

4 The greatest challenge to the development of the Indonesian media remains the low levels of economic and social development. This has been compounded by the economic setback the country has suffered since the economic crisis started in 1997. Even with a flourishing independent and free press, it can only bring about limited benefits of democracy and good governance to the people if they have limited access to the media. Continued efforts need to be made to improve the human development especially through increasing the level of education, literacy rates, and reducing poverty. The viability of the press freedom in Indonesia rests on these issues and the other media issues being resolved and successfully dealt with, before it can play its role in democracy and development. An independent and responsible media, and a politically mature and developed society are key

¹⁸⁵ Center for Democracy and Governance, 1999.

pillars of support to sustain democracy in Indonesia.

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