

# MUTED VOICES

## CENSORSHIP AND THE BROADCAST MEDIA IN INDONESIA

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

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The arbitrary banning two years ago of three leading publications — *Tempo*, *DeTik* and *Editor* — drew international attention to a fact that was already well known in Indonesia: that the press in this rapidly developing Asian nation continues to be subject to a pervasive regime of state control. This is maintained, for the most part, through a largely unseen system of informal pressure and influence operated, primarily, by the misleadingly-named Information Ministry. But, on occasions, as when the three publications were suppressed in June 1994, it involves resort to direct censorship, to bannings of newspapers and to the imprisonment or dismissal of journalists.

*Tempo* and the other two publications were banned because they had overstepped the mark, the ill-defined line beyond which the Indonesian media dare not stray when commenting on political or other matters which the government considers too sensitive for public consumption. Their error had been to interpret too literally the promise which President Suharto himself had made in 1990, that a new era of "openness" (*keterbukaan*), was being inaugurated, in which a greater degree of press freedom would be tolerated. They had begun to delve into issues such as official corruption and to point to divisions within the politico-military establishment. As a result, they became increasingly popular — *Tempo* was the country's most prominent weekly magazine at the time of its banning and *DeTik's* circulation was growing rapidly — but eventually they tested the government's new found tolerance too far. Then they paid the price.

The June 1994 bannings, and subsequent official efforts to intimidate journalists who formed AJI (Aliansi Jurnalis Independen), the Alliance of Independent Journalists, has inevitably had a chilling effect on Indonesia's print media. Three journalists and a young office worker for AJI were sentenced to prison terms in 1995 and are still being held. The three publications also remain banned: to widespread surprise, *Tempo's* former editor won a court ruling against Harmoko, the Information Minister who banned his newspaper, but this success was short-lived. The decision was overturned by the Supreme Court on 13 June 1996, amid scenes of tight security, in what many regard as a politically-motivated judgment.

While attention has understandably focused on the difficulties faced by the print media, the role of the broadcast media has been almost completely ignored — and this, despite the fact that radio and television in Indonesia have a far greater reach than the print media. In fact, some 40 million of the country's population of over 190 million are estimated to own radio sets, over 60 per cent of them in rural areas, and there are around 9 million televisions with an estimated audience of 90 million viewers. By comparison, the print media is more limited: its total circulation is put at between 15 and 16 million and its readership is concentrated primarily in urban areas.

Yet, the past few years have seen very significant developments in the broadcast media with the advent of commercial television and, now, with a new Broadcasting Bill being laid before Parliament. How is it that radio and television, such potentially powerful and influential media, have avoided the traps in which the print media has been ensnared? Or have they? What are the controls, if any, under which they are obliged to operate? And has the advent of commercial television represented a new and more genuine "openness" on the part of the government than that offered to the print media?

The purpose of this report is to explore these and other questions about the role of the broadcast media in Indonesia. It looks at state-controlled television and radio, and traces the development of commercial broadcasting and the implications arising from issues of ownership. It also examines the largely discreet but essentially effective means by which the government holds the broadcast media in check and ensures its subservience to the powers that be. What it reveals is a complex panorama of competing tensions as both the government and the broadcasters struggle, in their different ways, to meet the new possibilities and challenges, and the new threats and opportunities, presented by technological advancement and the rapid development of Indonesian society. What it finds is a system in dire need of reform, one in which a paternalistically-inclined oligarchic government appears still to be intent on maintaining close supervision over the flow of information to its people — and suppressing free expression and exchange about matters of obvious public interest when it finds that inconvenient.

Reform is urgently needed, both for its own sake and because without reform it will be impossible for other political parties to compete on an equal footing with the long-ruling Golkar party when the next parliamentary elections are held in 1997. The pro-government bias of the state-run broadcasters must be eradicated, and private radio and television must be freed from current government interference. If not, the broadcasting media will continue to be unable to fulfil their proper role in fostering democracy and governmental accountability in Indonesia, and in ensuring that the fundamental rights to freedom of expression and access to information are assured.

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## 2. NEWS AS A TOOL OF THE STATE: STATE CONTROL AND THE BROADCAST MEDIA

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State-controlled radio and television are both well established in Indonesia and have been operating for over 30 years. The state-controlled radio network, RRI (Radio Republik Indonesia), was founded in 1945 and today comprises some 50 local stations across the country. In addition, there are some 150 municipal government stations.

Television was introduced in 1962 with the launch of the state-controlled station, TVRI (Televisi Republik Indonesia). From its inception, TVRI has been regarded by the authorities as a tool for education, culture and nation-building, as well as government propaganda. When TVRI was established during President Sukarno's period in power (1945-1966), the government made its paternalistic goals for the station patently clear. Thus, paragraph 1 of the Presidential decree of February 1963, KEPPRES/27/1963, which concerns TVRI, prescribes the role of state television as having "a function as a mass communications instrument to carry out mental, spiritual and physical development as part of Indonesian nation building, especially in the development of Indonesian socialist humanity." ("mempunyai fungsi sebagai alat komunikasi massa untuk menjelenggarakan pembangunan dibidang mental/rohani, spirituil dan djasmaniah/fisik dalam rangka Nation Building Indonesia, Pembentukan Manusia Sosialis Indonesia khususnya.")

Not surprisingly, TVRI has undergone many changes since it was founded due to the advent of commercial and satellite television stations, and other factors. Yet, in many respects the style and content of its programming today still reflects those early government perceptions of its role as an educator and as a nation-building tool. As a consequence, it is widely criticized for its formality, its often dull programming and what is seen as its general unresponsiveness to consumer demand. Much more serious though is the heavily pro-government slant that the station places on the news that it presents and its readiness to gloss over or ignore issues which would cast the government and its policies in a poor light. For example, the rapid pace of the country's development, which is much trumpeted by the government as a measure of its competence and success, is invariably portrayed in the most positive terms. Yet, little or no attention is given to the more negative aspects of the development process, such as the tension and conflict aroused between the developers, and their government backers, and the local communities whose lives and livelihoods may be threatened by their plans.

More than 30 years after TVRI was set up, the New Order government of President Suharto appears to have much the same view as its predecessor of the role of TVRI and of all state broadcasting — judging by the provisions of a long-awaited Broadcasting Bill which it laid before Parliament in early May 1996 (see below). As long ago as 1981, for example, President Suharto expressed this essentially paternalistic view of the role of the broadcast media when he announced his decision to impose a ban on advertising on state television, which remains in force to this day, and explained his purpose in the following way:

To focus television more towards the facilitation of development programmes, and to prevent side effects which do not contribute to the spirit of development, I hereby announce that I have directed that from 1 April 1981 next advertising on Indonesian television will be banned. (Untuk tebih memusatkan siaran televisi bagi kelancaran pelaksanaan program-program pembangunan dan untuk menghindarkan akibat-akibat samping yang tidak menguntungkan bagi semangat pembangunan maka saya telah memberi petunjuk agar 1 April 1981 nanti siaran iklan di TVRI ditiadakan.)

In fact, the Suharto government extends a similar approach to all broadcast media, whether state-controlled or in private hands. This was made clear when the first commercial television station, RCTI (Rajawali Citra

Televisi Indonesia), was granted the right to establish a restricted broadcasting service for Jakarta and the surrounding area in 1987. The governmental decree relating to the new station indicated that commercial television broadcasting was being allowed in order, among other reasons, to realize the benefits of national development. It stipulated also that any advertising carried by the station must also promote national development.

The government continues to exercise close control over the dissemination of information to the people of Indonesia. This is done through a variety of means but one key method which is employed to keep the broadcast media in check is a legal prohibition on the production and broadcasting of news material by the private television and radio networks. None are permitted to generate their own news programmes. On the contrary, they are required under a 1990 decree issued by the Information Minister to broadcast government news programming, which is supplied to them by the relevant state broadcasters, by TVRI in the case of television and for private radio broadcasters by RRI. Commercial television stations are obliged to carry TVRI news programmes three times a day, while commercial radio has to air a total of 13 news bulletins from RRI daily. In addition, commercial radio and television stations are required to broadcast other items which the government deems to be of national importance. Inevitably, such news programmes invariably provide a version of events which owes more to the government's particular perspective on events than to more proper journalistic considerations such as newsworthiness, accuracy, comprehensiveness and balance. Consequently, broadcast news reporting seldom contains any reference to the views of the government's political opponents or critics. Moreover, events that are deemed to be especially sensitive politically or which reflect poorly on the government all too often are not reported at all.

This clearly conflicts with international law and standards relating to freedom of expression and the free flow of information, which place an onus on governments to ensure that conditions exist which enable the press, including the broadcast media, to carry out its two key functions — to inform the public about matters of public interest and to act as a watchdog of government. It conflicts too with Indonesia's own Constitution, which states that "freedom of the Press and similar freedoms shall be provided by law." In fact, in Indonesia today there is no sense in which state-run radio and television stations can be seen as true public service broadcasters, while those commercial stations which make some, albeit limited, efforts to air views other than those furnished by the government run the risk of incurring undefined sanctions. The notion of public interest, so far as the Indonesian government is concerned, is synonymous with the government's own interest and does not at all encompass the airing of views or commentary which conflicts with government policy.

This was demonstrated by the case of Radio Unisi, a privately-owned radio station in Yogyakarta, Central Java, whose coverage touched on sensitive political issues and led the authorities to send a stern warning to broadcasters about their future conduct. In March 1995, the head of the BPRSNP (Badan Pembina Radio Siaran Non-Pemerintah), the Non-governmental Private Radio Development Body, ordered all privately-owned radio stations in the region not to broadcast any material with political content or which could be considered likely to create conflict. He justified this instruction on the grounds that such broadcasts could cause the public to form opinions which conflict with government policy. According to the Information Ministry official, he felt obliged to issue the instruction because some radio stations in the region were "deviating" from their obligation to observe the government's security guidelines. This, he said, had to cease or else it could disturb national stability and endanger the future of radio broadcasting. He stressed too that private broadcasters were expected to respect the values of Pancasila, the state ideology.

The action taken by the head of the BPRSNP in Yogyakarta was consistent with a wider pattern of behaviour on the part of the Indonesian government, which has frequently sought to suppress or inhibit legitimate political criticism and dissent by openly accusing its detractors of threatening "national security" or expressing anti-Pancasila sentiments. It came shortly after the authorities became aware that cassette tape recordings of an interview with Permadi, a popular soothsayer in Java, were being circulated in Yogyakarta. Permadi, a leading exponent of the Javanese mystical tradition known as *kebatinan*, had been interviewed on Radio Unisi, where he was asked about his predictions for the year ahead. In response, he had predicted a period of

political uncertainty for the country and suggested that Megawati Soekarnoputri, the leader of the opposition PDI, and daughter of the country's first President, Sukarno, might succeed Suharto as President. Such a reference to the political succession in Indonesia, though clearly a matter of prime public concern, was considered highly sensitive and unwelcome by the authorities. The tapes were subsequently banned and a military spokesperson said that there would be an investigation to establish whether the radio station had aired Permadi's predictions simply for entertainment or out of a political motivation. The military commander of Central Java, Lieutenant-General Soeyono, also publicly criticized the recording of the Permadi interview in threatening terms:

The contents of the cassette do not only have provocative overtones, but actually constitute dangerous agitation.

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### 3. OWNERSHIP OF PRIVATE TELEVISION AND RADIO

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There are more than 600 privately owned radio stations out of a total of over 800 stations throughout the country. Some are targeted at particular religious groups and a small number broadcast in minority languages, though even these are required to transmit RRI-supplied Indonesian language news bulletins. Private television ownership, meanwhile, is a new phenomenon. For almost 30 years, the single, state-owned broadcaster, TVRI, enjoyed a market monopoly as a national network. The last six years though have witnessed major changes in the realm of television, as five national commercial broadcasters have been licensed and have come into operation.

In view of the potential political influence of television, it might appear at first sight that the decision to permit the development of commercial television in Indonesia was a significant step forward for a government which has consistently made clear its view that television should be used to promote its particular concept of nation-building. The decision, however, needs to be measured against a context of rapidly developing technology, such as video and satellite which was becoming increasingly attractive and accessible to a population whose only alternative was the overly formal, frequently turgid and dull programming offered by TVRI. The advent of domestic commercial television served, therefore, to help divert — though by no means to overcome — public interest in international programming over which the Indonesian government has no editorial control. Indeed, foreign satellite television remains highly popular in Indonesia. Ownership of satellite receiver dishes is estimated at around 1.2 million, the highest level in Asia, with viewers able to receive a wide range of channels including Asia Business News, Star TV and Australia Television, as well as Malaysian and Thai channels. Receiver dishes were first introduced after Indonesia launched its own domestic communications satellite in 1976, but their high price initially put them beyond the reach of all but the wealthiest sector of society. Later, as they became more cheaply and widely available, and the authorities recognized the potential influence of foreign broadcasting, the government made some efforts to control access to satellite reception but eventually abandoned them as unworkable. The authorities' current approach to foreign satellite broadcasting was best illustrated early this year when it was reported that a Portuguese satellite company, RTP International, would start beaming broadcasts to East Timor, the former Portuguese colony now ruled by Indonesia. Instead of trying to interfere directly with such transmissions, the government called on state and private broadcasters in Indonesia to provide more programming to East Timor in order to "straighten out" the information broadcast on the Portuguese channel for the local audience.

One of the main factors explaining the government's decision to allow commercial television broadcasting emerges when the question of ownership is considered. A brief survey of the major shareholders of the five commercial television stations now operating suggests strongly that, far from facilitating genuine media

pluralism, the government's approach has been to ensure that commercial television broadcasting is placed under the direct control and influence of the ruling elite, so continuing to ensure a compliant television industry.

So centrally involved are members of the President's family and close entourage in Indonesia's commercial television that it appears almost to take on the image of a family business, and a lucrative one at that given the financial opportunities arising from the continuing ban on advertising by the state broadcaster, TVRI. Likewise, commercial television is closely linked to the ruling Golkar party: senior office holders within Golkar hold controlling interests or senior positions in at least three commercial television stations and none of the five are controlled by individuals associated with either of the two main opposition parties, the PDI and the PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan), United Development Party.

The oldest and most successful of the commercial television stations, RCTI, is part of the Bimantara Citra group, a public company headed by President Suharto's second son, Bambang Trihatmodjo, who is also Golkar's Treasurer. Another of the President's children, his eldest daughter, Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana (widely known as Mbak Tutut), has the controlling interest in Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia (TPI), through the holding company, Cipta Lamtoro Gung Persada, which owns TPI. She is a Vice-Chairperson of Golkar. Surya Citra Televisi (SCTV) is supported by a consortium which includes Sudwikatmono, the President's cousin. Cakrawala Andalas Televisi (ANTeve) also has close links with Golkar, another of whose Vice-Chairpersons is one of its directors and shareholders. Finally, the youngest of the five commercial channels, Indosiar Visual Mandiri (Indosiar), is owned by the Salim Group, headed by business tycoon Liem Sioe Liong, a longstanding close friend of the President.

In a country where the government has a long and continuing record of censorship of the mass media, the domination of commercial television by either the relatives or close business associates of the President is clearly a major cause for concern. This is not to suggest that political considerations alone will have led such individuals to become directly involved in the establishment of privately-owned television, or were even necessarily been the main factor given the substantial new opportunities for wealth creation provided by the advent of commercial television. However, the fact of such involvement by members of a political elite very close to, and dependent upon, the government makes it all the more unlikely that commercial television stations, as they are now, will be permitted to engage in independent and balanced reporting or to strongly criticize aspects of government policy. Certainly, there has been no evidence to date, taking account of the style, format and content of their programming, to suggest that the commercial television stations enjoy any real independence from the political powers that be.

Even if commercial considerations were to encourage the television companies to take a more independent political line, however, the fact that broadcast licences are granted by a government body, the Ministry of Information, and can be summarily withdrawn, clearly mitigates against their taking a political stand against the government. The fate of the dozens of newspapers and magazines that have been banned over the years by the Minister of Information, who similarly controls the granting and withdrawal of licences for the print media, is a lesson from which the broadcast media has learned.

The circumstances in which commercial television contracts or licences have been granted, and the criteria on which they are based, remain surrounded in obscurity. For example, when the first commercial station, RCTI, received official authorization to commence broadcasting, it was apparently given a contract permitting it to do so for a period of 20 years "as long as everything is in accord with government policy", a term which was not further defined. The contract indicated that RCTI's broadcasting licence can be extended after the first 20 years, but reportedly does not specify for how long or whether any subsequent extension will be allowed.

What does appear clear is that the arrangements for the establishment of commercial television broadcasting have been made behind closed doors, away from the possibility of public scrutiny, and that those best placed to take advantage of this secretive system have been "insiders", individuals who already enjoy close family,

business or political connections with the President. By the same token, those outside the inner circle or who are seen as government critics, appear to face significant obstacles if they wish to become involved in private broadcasting. In one case, for example, a company seeking to set up a local television station in Yogyakarta is believed to have had its bid rejected because one of its backers was Husein Naro, the son of a leading supporter of the opposition PPP party. Instead, the licence was given to a company with close links to the Sultan of Yogyakarta, another member of the government's inner circle.

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## 4. CENSORSHIP IN THE BROADCAST MEDIA

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We learned our wisdom about the need for self-censorship from the fate of *Tempo*, *Editor* and *DeTik*. Theirs was a very expensive experience.

A major difference between the print and broadcast media — and possibly one reason why restrictions on freedom of expression affecting radio and television have received much less attention both at home and abroad — lies in the different methods of censorship employed by the government. Throughout the more than 30 years since the New Order government has been in power, there has been much and conspicuous evidence of press censorship. Dozens of publications have been banned; dozens of others have received written warnings that they too will be banned if they continue to transgress into areas of government sensitivity. By contrast, no private radio or television station has been banned and written warnings, too, are rare or unheard of. Indeed, according to one senior radio station executive interviewed by ARTICLE 19, such written warnings have not been forthcoming even when requested by radio stations which have received verbal warnings or "requests" by the authorities to avoid certain topics.

But, bannings and warnings are no more than the formal mechanisms of censorship that the government invokes when other, less visible and direct forms of censorship have proved ineffective — and the broadcast media are no more immune to such methods than the print media. Indeed, the very fact that the broadcasters have so far escaped formal sanctions suggests that they may be even more vulnerable to pressure than their print media counterparts to toe the government's line.

Self-censorship is widely acknowledged as being pervasive throughout the Indonesian media. In broadcasting, as in the print media, editors and journalists exercise self-censorship on a daily basis and know that certain issues are taboo. These include topics covered by the government's security guidelines, commonly known by their Indonesian acronym MISS SARA, which forbid the reporting of issues that the government deems seditious, insinuating, sensational, speculative or likely to antagonise ethnic, religious, racial or group feelings. Outright criticism of the President and his family is also taboo.

Beyond these topics, the situation is much less clear and journalists and editors are left to feel their way for themselves. In this way, they are made to become their own censors. Their task is made more difficult also because of the fluidity which surrounds what may or may not be reported: issues or individuals which they report on one week may suddenly become off limits — as the three publications banned in June 1994 learnt to their cost. Executives from both radio and television, like their counterparts in the print media, stress the difficulties created by the lack of clear limits as to what they may or may not cover. This, and the government's ever-shifting line of tolerance of what is and what is not acceptable, they say, inevitably provokes a climate of self-censorship and results in certain stories not being reported even when it is not at all clear that the government would object to them, as journalists and editors adopt a "safety first" attitude. Even the state-owned TVRI suffers from this dilemma: in January 1995, for example, the television station decided not to broadcast a play entitled *Mbalelo*, performed by the Teater Paku Yogyakarta, apparently because of

concern that its storyline might be seen to reflect too much social realism. Station executives explained their action as representing simply a delay in transmission and denied that they had banned the play from being shown on television.

The broadcast media, like the print media, is also exposed to the euphemistically-named *budaya telepon*, or telephone culture. This is the system operated by Ministry of Information officials and, sometimes, by the military and other government officials, to remind the press that they are under constant scrutiny. It is a system which involves officials periodically telephoning editors and, in the case of the commercial broadcast media, major shareholders to "appeal" to them to avoid a certain topic or to follow the government line on a particular issue. Editors then are expected to relay the same message to their producers and journalists, to ensure that they tone down their coverage, avoid reference to specific individuals or do whatever is necessary to satisfy the official's appeal. According to one broadcasting executive interviewed by ARTICLE 19, "they always tell us to be objective, but their definition of objectivity is often very different from ours." At other times, editors and journalists are exhorted by officials to report more "good news" stories in tones which suggest that, if they fail to do so, they will be perceived as unsatisfactory citizens.

Though less overt and — thus far, at least — less dramatic, censorship within the broadcast media is no less insidious than in the written press. In fact, as radio and television stations currently operate within a looser and less clearly defined framework, the restrictions with which they have to contend are sometimes greater than those which constrain the print media. This can and does lead to some strange anomalies. For example, while newspapers were regularly reporting the high profile trial of Sri Bintang Pamungkas in December 1995, a senior television executive told ARTICLE 19 that their station was "steering clear" of it. The executive explained that government officials had made it known to the television station that Sri Bintang Pamungkas, an outspoken opposition parliamentarian who was being prosecuted for allegedly criticising the government when on a visit to Germany in April 1995, was considered by the authorities to be "*persona non grata* for the moment". An executive at another station similarly told ARTICLE 19 in December 1995 that it would be "somewhat risky" to broadcast an interview with Sri Bintang Pamungkas at that time. The same executive pointed to the 1994 riots in North Sumatra as another occasion when the broadcast media faced greater restrictions on their freedom of expression than the written press: the riots were reported by newspapers but when the television station proposed covering the story the Minister of Information, Harmoko, "appealed" to it not to do so, and obtained compliance. In a further case, neither TVRI, the state-run television channel, nor the commercial television broadcasters, reported the trials of Ahmad Taufik, Chairman of AJI (Aliansi Jurnalis Independen), the Alliance of Independent Journalists, and three other media workers, in mid-1995. All four were convicted and sentenced to prison terms for allegedly insulting the President or other offences.

Other well-known critics, among them Abdurrahman Wahid, head of the Nahdlatul Ulema, the largest Muslim organization in the country, and Permadi, the soothsayer and Chairperson of the Association of Indonesian Psychics, are also said to have been marked down at certain times as "off limits" by radio and television station managers.

Despite the earlier warnings to broadcasters to steer clear of Sri Bintang Pamungkas, two extracts of an interview with him were broadcast by Radio Unisi in June 1996. These concerned his formation of a new political party and his recent trial on charges of insulting the President. Radio Unisi intended to broadcast the remainder of the interview, covering a range of issues, in a further four parts, but was forestalled by a telephone call from the Information Ministry, which made it clear to the stations that no more of the interview should be put out.

Also in June 1996, the Ministry of Information intervened to ensure that commercial television stations gave positive coverage to the decision of the Supreme Court to overturn two lower court rulings, that Information Minister Harmoko had exceeded his powers when he banned *Tempo* magazine in 1994. As a result, the stations concentrated heavily on the government's side of the case, carrying interviews with Harmoko and his lawyers and supporters, but devoting little or no time to the reaction of *Tempo's* former editor, Goenawan

Mohamad, who had brought the case, and others who considered it a blatantly political judgment.

The situation in the television industry is further complicated by the close links between the major shareholders and both the President and the ruling Golkar party. It is not suggested that these leading shareholders interfere in editorial decisions on a day to day basis. Nor is there any need for them to do so: mere knowledge of their involvement and interests among editors and journalists is sufficient to influence thinking as to what should and should not be aired. According to one television executive interviewed by ARTICLE 19:

All news departments like to maintain their integrity and not be influenced by anything other than their journalistic spirit. But if you are constantly made aware of who you belong to, of who is putting your food on the table, you tend to be careful about what you say.

Despite these factors inhibiting freedom of expression in the broadcast media, some journalists and programme makers have been pushing at the invisible boundaries set by the government for "acceptable" political debate and informed criticism, albeit gradually and tentatively. According to one journalist, "We do try to push as hard as we can, but we have to be practical and pragmatic...it is better to have our news with all its weaknesses and its limitations than not to have any news at all." So, while the more courageous continue to explore the boundaries of what will be tolerated, they do so with considerable caution, especially when touching on issues which they know the government considers controversial. Occasionally, they overstep the mark — and pay the consequences.

One of the best known examples of this occurred in the case of *Perspektif*, a weekly talk show produced for SCTV by an independent production house. In September 1995, the show was suddenly axed without warning. SCTV executives denied that this was the result of political pressure by the government, but well-placed sources within the television station contradicted this. They reported that a high ranking Ministry of Information official had telephoned one of SCTV's owners to complain about the show, which has already received a number of discreet warnings from the government, and called for it to be dropped. The owner is then said to have spoken to the station's management, who agreed to axe the programme and informed the production company of their decision.

Wimar Witoelar, who presented *Perspektif*, described the show as "a forum where people get away from slogans and the standard euphemisms", but has no doubt that its content and style would be considered unremarkable and uncontroversial in many other countries. The programme's format was one of interviews with individuals from many different walks of life, including lawyers and jurists, economists, artists and others, but its style was unusual given the political caution which normally characterizes the Indonesian broadcast media. It encouraged open and free-flowing discussion among those participating about a variety of issues, from politics and economics to the arts and daily life. As a result, it soon acquired a reputation for being politically brave, and developed a strong following.

Two *Perspektif* programmes, in particular, got the show into difficulties before it was finally scrapped. The first was an interview with Abdurrahman Wahid in early 1995, which SCTV executives announced would not be screened as planned citing, "technical reasons". The second, later in 1995, involved a judge, Benjamin Mangkoedilaga, who was then head of the Jakarta Administrative Court, and occurred only a few weeks after he had unexpectedly, and controversially, ruled against the government in a case brought by Goenawan Mohamad, the former editor of *Tempo* magazine. Effectively, the judge had decided that Harmoko, the powerful Information Minister, had acted wrongly when he withdrew the publishing licences of *Tempo* and two other weeklies in June 1994 in order to prevent their further publication. Prior to Judge Mangkoedilaga's ruling, knowing that court judgments seldom go against the government in Indonesia, few had imagined that he would rule in *Tempo's* favour — so when he did so, he was hailed by many as having taken a brave stand. Again, when they announced that the show would not be broadcast as planned, SCTV executives were quick to deny suggestions that they had caved in to official pressure, insisting that the interview was simply being

delayed. Significantly, however, it has yet to be screened. Moreover, the respected bi-weekly magazine, *Forum Keadilan*, reported that an Information Ministry official had telephoned one of SCTV's major shareholders and "requested" that the programme not be shown. It was also suggested that the authorities had been prompted to take action by the publication of an article about Wimar Witoelar's interview with Benjamin Mangkoedilaga in *Merdeka*, an Indonesian-language daily newspaper, on the day before the interview was to be screened. The article was headlined, "Tomorrow Night SCTV's *Perspektif* Presents the 'Hero' of Justice". ("Perspektif SCTV Besok Petan Hadirkan 'Pahlawan' Keadilan")

The last straw for the authorities, as far as *Perspektif* was concerned, appears to have been an interview with journalist and author, Mochtar Lubis, who is well-known as an outspoken critic of the government. Although he did not say anything in the interview that was more critical or controversial than comments he had previously made in newspapers and magazines, it seems that the periodic airing of views unsympathetic to the government in *Perspektif* programmes had now become too much for the Information Ministry to tolerate. Shortly after the interview with Mochtar Lubis was screened, SCTV announced that *Perspektif* had been dropped even though less than half of the 26 programmes originally scheduled had been shown.

The sudden scrapping of the *Perspektif* television show prompted considerable publicity as well as protests from viewers. The show's host, Wimar Witoelar, responded to requests from a number of groups by hosting a series of shows called *Perspektif Live* before live audiences in several cities. Since then, a related show entitled *Perspektif Baru*, or New Perspective, has been syndicated to over two dozen regional newspapers and radio stations in 18 cities across the country. In Jakarta, however, one radio station, M 97, has already terminated its transmission of *Perspektif Baru*, apparently after coming under pressure from the authorities to do so. After only four or five programmes of the series had been broadcast, M 97 informed the programme makers that the show was causing the radio station a number of problems and that certain unnamed but influential people were asking questions about the programme. Not long afterwards, in March 1996, M 97 announced that the series was being halted. The station manager insisted that the decision had been taken purely for internal reasons, related to programme scheduling problems. In fact, however, according to a well informed source with close links to the station, M 97 had been pressurised to drop the show, for political reasons, by the representative body for private radio, to which all private radio stations must belong, and also by military intelligence and other government officials.

Other radio programmes have also suffered the same fate as *Perspektif* after pushing a little too far at the boundaries of official tolerance by airing critical political commentary. In June 1995, for example, the Jakarta-based Ramako radio station took its popular Friday breakfast programme off the air only a few months after Trijaya Radio — owned by the Bimantara Citra group, headed by the President's second son, Bambang Trihatmodjo — stopped its *Jakarta Round Up* programme, a regular two hour live talk show discussing the news of the day. Both programmes had become popular because of their willingness to interview vocal government critics and to air discussion of public interest issues, including politically sensitive topics such as the Presidential succession, divisions within the military, government restrictions on the media, and the role of Golkar. Before it was taken off the air, *Jakarta Round Up's* programme manager was apparently warned on several occasions about the boldness of its content by company executives anxious about possible repercussions.

In both cases the radio stations denied that they had come under pressure from the authorities to drop the programmes. Ramako's station manager justified the decision by reference to the need to exercise "self control". For its part, the management of Trijaya Radio claimed that they had taken a purely business decision because there was a need to revamp the programme and that after four years the listeners had been becoming bored — a charge hotly denied by Nor Pud Binarto, one of *Jakarta Round Up's* presenters. Far from its popularity fading, he has pointed out that just days before the decision was taken to drop the programme he had obtained agreement to increase its time allocation.

One of the most recently publicized case of censorship in the broadcast media occurred in April 1996 when

the airing of a television debate for SCTV's *Di Balik Berita* (Behind the News) programme on the leadership crisis in a provincial chapter of the PDI was delayed for almost a month. The debate centred on the long-running dispute within the East Java branch of the PDI as to who is its legitimate head. It featured a political scientist from Airlangga University and the two main protagonists in the dispute, Sutjipto and Latief Pudjosakti, both of whom claim to be the rightful head of the PDI branch in East Java.

Just hours before the programme was due to be recorded, the SCTV management was apparently warned by the authorities to be "careful" and local officials are reported to have asked for advance copies of the tape of the programme. Provincial officials are said to have been unhappy with the debate, during which the local administration's stand on the crisis — Latief Pudjosakti is believed to enjoy the tacit support of East Java's provincial governor while Sutjipto has the backing of PDI Chairperson, Megawati Soekarnoputri — was criticized. When the programme was finally broadcast on 25 April 1996, nearly four weeks after it was recorded, sections of the debate had been edited out. Sutjipto complained, for example, that comments he had made — to the effect that the crisis could not be resolved until the government showed the necessary political will, and that political parties should not have to ask the government for its approval when establishing a new executive board — were omitted from the programme when it was broadcast.

Since the broadcast, the programme's producer, Supandi Syahrul, has been sacked by SCTV. His letter of dismissal gives as the reason his criticism of another SCTV programme, noting that he had commented on its low audience ratings in an article in a Surabaya-based newspaper in late March. Supandi Syahrul, however, is convinced that his dismissal was directly related to the programme about the PDI branch leadership dispute. The timing of his sacking, just three weeks after the controversial programme was broadcast, lends credence to his claim, as does an earlier *Jakarta Post* article, which appeared on 15 March. Quoting "a reliable source", this disclosed that a director and a shareholder of SCTV were angry about the Sutjipto-Latief debate because they feared that it could sour relations between the company and the government.

One striking similarity in all these cases is the fact that, at least ostensibly, the decisions to drop or delay the programmes concerned were made by radio station managers, not by the government or the stations' owners or shareholders. In all cases, however, there are strong indications to suggest that it was "appeals" by government officials, targeted at shareholders and senior station executives, which caused these programmes to be disrupted. Through such means, as well as through the requirement that the broadcast media only carry officially-sanctioned news, the government remains extremely well-placed, despite the commercialization of radio and television broadcasting, to shape, control and, at times, manipulate the flow of information to the people of Indonesia.

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## 5. BROADCASTING CONTENT

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Unsurprisingly, given the significant constraints on what the media may cover, the main focus for all private television and radio in Indonesia is on entertainment. Music makes up far and away the bulk of radio programming. In the case of the television stations, each of the five private channels has carved out a particular niche for itself. RCTI and SCTV aim for the same middle and upper middle class audience and show a mixture of foreign films, American programmes, sport and Indonesian sinetrons (dramas). TPI — originally intended as an educational channel — has been nicknamed "Televisi Pembantu Indonesia" (Indonesia Maids' Television) because of the popularity among domestic workers of the Latin American soap operas that have become a hallmark of the station. ANTeve targets the youth and sports market, while Indosiar aims to capture the affluent ethnic Chinese audience.

Within the constraints in which they are required to operate, however, both television and radio — like the print industry — have been trying increasingly to respond to the needs of Indonesia's growing middle class, with its taste for a more open media which is prepared to address issues of public concern. Accordingly, radio phone-in programmes and talk shows have been growing in popularity and, consequently, in number. Television stations such as SCTV, RCTI and ANTeve have also increased their output of factual programming.

There is, however, still a long way to go, and the future for the broadcasters is anything but assured. The new period of "openness" for the press announced by President Suharto in 1990, which allowed the print media at least some greater scope to respond to public demand for more news and information on current affairs, at least until the June 1994 banning of *Tempo* and other weeklies, has scarcely been reflected in the broadcast media. A main reason for this, as one Indonesian newspaper journalist put it to ARTICLE 19, may well be that:

the problem for the broadcast media is that they deal in sounds and pictures. Our [the print media] advantage is that we use the written word. We can't necessarily say what we want outright. But people can still read between the lines.

That the broadcast media continue to have to operate within even stricter limits than the written press is underlined by the retention of the embargo on private radio and television stations producing their own news material, and by the stipulation that they carry only news material prepared by the state-run broadcasters. This requirement has been retained in the new Broadcasting Bill, which the government recently laid before Parliament, despite the very severe restraint it imposes on the broadcasters' ability to respond to public demands for more, and more varied, information about key issues affecting the political and social life of Indonesia. In fact, one reason for its retention in the new Bill may well be anxiety on the part of the government about the broadcast media's increasingly varied and imaginative attempts to circumvent the ban on news coverage.

There has been a growing trend among some radio and television stations to try and find ways to satisfy audience demands for more information, as reflected by the relatively high audience figures for foreign satellite broadcasts. They have done this by broadcasting "feature news" or human interest programmes which provide a more in-depth and, sometimes, more analytical approach to news stories. RCTI's regular news feature programme, *Seputar Indonesia* (Around Indonesia), for example, has proven highly popular with the public.

So far, broadcasters have been tacitly permitted to follow this course by the authorities, but for how long no-one can be sure. There have already been some signs that the trend may soon be checked. For example, while SCTV was able to run four new news feature programmes — one on events in Parliament, another on social issues, a third on crime and the law, and a fourth on the press — for six months without experiencing any problems, the Ministry of Information eventually warned the station's senior management that the government was concerned about the political overtones of some of the subjects covered. It was "suggested" that, in future, the Ministry should be informed about the contents of each programme one week in advance of its scheduled transmission. According to ARTICLE 19's sources, SCTV has so far resisted, but the Ministry's action shows clearly that the government is continuing to keep a watchful eye on the broadcast media.

Where some television stations use magazine programme formats and featurized reporting in order to get around the restrictions on news programmes, or try to disguise such programmes under other names, a number of radio stations feature live interviews and phone-ins. By their very nature, such techniques carry greater risks for the programme makers as no prior censorship is possible. Yet, even though they sometimes carry critical commentary, to date such programmes appear to have avoided the fate of Radio Trijaya's *Jakarta Round Up* programme and Ramako radio's Friday breakfast show. Why this is so is somewhat unclear: some observers suggest that it is simply because the authorities are not yet systematically monitoring the stations'

output, perhaps because they consider it a less influential medium, and that the situation will change if they start to do so.

Important though they are, such programmes remain the exception. Most often, it remains the case that if an issue is considered sensitive it will either not be covered or it will be reported according to the prepared government line, with no attempt at proper analysis. For example, when *Tempo*, *Editor* and *DeTik* were suppressed by Information Minister Harmoko in June 1994, neither RCTI nor ANTeve included any discussion of, or reactions to, the bans and simply ran footage of the Minister's announcement. Certainly, they did not include interviews with any of the victims of the Minister's action, such as editors, journalists or ordinary readers.

In general, news coverage on both state-run and private radio and television is concerned primarily with the government and its activities, and the activities of the government-backed party, Golkar. Very limited air time is devoted to the activities of the main opposition parties, even on major political issues. For example, according to information apparently emanating from TVRI itself, in the three month period to the end of June 1995, TVRI news items included 98 references to Golkar, whereas the two other leading political parties, the PPP and the PDI received 10 and two mentions respectively. During the same period, Information Minister Harmoko, in his role as head of Golkar, was mentioned 38 times compared to 10 references to Buya Ismail, the leader of the PPP, and only one reference to the PDI leader, Megawati Soekarnoputri. Commenting on this sort of imbalance in news reporting, one television executive told ARTICLE 19 that media workers feel they have little option but to comply with "requests" for coverage from government or Golkar officials:

Perhaps there may be a few eyebrows raised and sighs as you pack the camera. But of course you go. It is part of your duty.

This bias is likely to become even more marked in the run-up to the national parliamentary elections scheduled for 1997, and the next Presidential election in 1998. One television executive anticipated: "although not formally, they [Golkar] will be asking us, in some cases demanding of us, certain facilities, certain exposures, certain slots". Senior executives in the broadcasting industry are often members of Golkar and, in the case of at least three of the commercial television stations — RCTI, TPI and ANTeve — those with controlling interests or senior positions in the companies also currently hold senior positions in Golkar. These factors, coupled with past evidence of strong pro-government bias in political reporting at the time of elections, suggest that media coverage of the forthcoming elections will be similarly flawed. Indeed, the PPP and the PDI have already accused Information Minister Harmoko of engaging in "disguised electioneering" during visits he made to different parts of Java during the fasting month, February, this year. Harmoko's tours, officially undertaken in his trips around the country in his capacity as Minister of Information, receive extensive coverage on TVRI and RRI, and thus in the news broadcasts put out by commercial television and radio stations. Yet, as his critics have been quick to point out, Minister Harmoko's visits also serve very well as campaigning sessions for Golkar, of which Harmoko has been Chairman since 1993.

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## 6. LEGISLATING FOR THE BROADCAST MEDIA

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Hopes that a long-awaited broadcasting bill might herald a new era of openness and media reform received a grave setback when the new bill (Rancangan Undang-Undang Penyiaran) was laid before Parliament on 6 May 1996. Rather than freeing up both the state-controlled and commercial media, if enacted in its present form the bill threatens to tighten already existing controls on media freedom. Commenting on the draft, Abdul Muis, a leading Indonesian communications specialist, was reported to have told a private meeting of

Members of the House of Representatives, "this bill is really a mess". He criticised the bill for focusing too much on control and for failing to guarantee freedom of expression in line with the 1945 Constitution.

The bill comprises 58 articles but provides that 22 of these may be supplemented by ministerial decrees, once the bill has become law. Such decrees are issued by the executive without reference to Parliament, and can be used to impose additional controls — for example, when he suppressed *Tempo*, *DeTik* and *Editor* in 1994, Information Minister Harmoko resorted to a 1984 Ministerial Decree empowering him to withdraw print media publications' publishing licences.

It was hoped that current restrictions on news gathering and reporting by commercial television and radio stations would be lifted, but these are largely retained if not reinforced. Article 27 of the bill specifically prohibits commercial stations from broadcasting news without first obtaining government permission, and provides no clarity as to how such permission might be obtained and under what conditions. At the same time, article 34 requires commercial broadcasters to relay official government broadcasts or else face a fine and/or up to nine months imprisonment. They are also required to carry items which the government regards as of national importance or decides must be relayed to the public immediately.

Other provisions of the bill include prohibitions on: the establishment of stations which seek to promote religious or political groups (article 9); foreign financial involvement in Indonesian commercial broadcasters (article 10); receipt of foreign assistance by Indonesian commercial broadcasters (article 12); the broadcasting of foreign-made programmes which threaten national security or cultural values, or which might damage Indonesia's good relations with other countries (article 24); and the broadcast of advertising by religious or political groups (article 32).

Several provisions appear designed specifically to tighten still further government control over the broadcast media. Thus, in order to operate at all, private broadcasters will need to obtain from the government both a permit to broadcast and a separate permit to use a frequency. This and the additional permit requirement for broadcasters wishing to air their own news compares adversely with the situation of the highly-censored print media, where a publishing licence only is required in order to be able to operate. Failure to comply with these requirements, according to the bill, may be punished by imprisonment for up to ten years and/or a fine. Furthermore, no clarification is given in the bill about the criteria under which licences will be granted. Moreover, article 48 envisages the creation of a unit within the Ministry of Information especially to monitor radio and television broadcasts, raising concern that this will simply facilitate increased censorship. Similar fears surround the proposal, in article 44, to establish a Consultative Body on National Broadcasting (*Badan Pertimbangan Siaran Nasional*).

The bill also suffers from a lack of clarity and definition, suggesting that when brought into law it could allow the government to bring prosecutions on vague grounds and thereby suppress freedom of expression. For example, the bill would make it an offence punishable by up to five years imprisonment and a fine to broadcast audio material that the government considers could disturb the unity and integrity of the nation or cause religious antagonism — yet, precisely what these terms may be seen to encompass is not set out in the bill. The fact that the government frequently uses claims of threats to national security as a means of suppressing legitimate political dissent therefore arouses concern as to how such a vaguely worded article might be interpreted.

As this summary of some of its main features demonstrates, the broadcasting bill is fundamentally flawed and, if enacted in anything near its present form, would

present a further unwarranted obstacle to the cause of media freedom — and to the public's right to know — in Indonesia.

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## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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As this report shows, the culture of censorship which pervades Indonesia affects not only the print media but every day impacts on the role of the broadcasters and gravely undermines their ability to perform the two key roles which the media should play in any democratic society — to inform the public and to help governmental accountability. It is essential, therefore, that calls for greater freedom of expression in the media in Indonesia should not focus solely on the serious problems facing the print media, but should also take full account of the urgent need for fundamental reform of the law and practice relating to broadcasting. Such reform should be directed particularly towards transforming state-run radio and television into truly public service broadcasting media, which should be done urgently, and into creating conditions in the private sector which promote the emergence of genuine media plurality.

ARTICLE 19 is calling on the Indonesian government to put in motion such changes by taking the following steps as a matter of priority:

- To enact legislation to transform the state-controlled radio and television networks in genuine independent public service broadcasters, and to establish an independent governing board and financial structure for these bodies in order to enable them to fulfil their public service functions and responsibilities free from government interference.
- To guarantee by law the principle of editorial independence and to remove, immediately and unconditionally, the prohibition on direct news gathering and reporting by private television and radio broadcasters.
- To end the practice, commonly known as *budaya telepon* (telephone culture), whereby government officials routinely use their positions of authority to exert improper influence on the media and to induce a climate of media self-censorship.
- To introduce an independent, transparent and non-discriminatory system for the allocation of private broadcasting licences, and to introduce measures to curb media monopolies, whether state or private, in the interests of promoting media pluralism.
- To create a legal climate conducive to freedom of expression through the removal of laws which restrict media freedom and to guarantee the public right of access to information through the enactment of a Freedom of Information Law.
- To ensure that the public is adequately informed about all matters related to their right to vote effectively, and to establish an independent mechanism to ensure equitable access to, and fair coverage on, the state broadcasting media by all those contesting national and, where appropriate, local elections.
- To sign and ratify key international standards guaranteeing freedom of expression and other fundamental human rights, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its (first) Optional Protocol, and the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights.

ARTICLE 19 also reiterates its appeal to the Indonesian government to implement the recommendations set out in the organization's previous reports on Indonesia, including particularly:

- To release immediately and unconditionally four media workers — Ahmad Taufik, Eko Maryadi, Danang Kukuh Wardoyo and Tri Agus Susanto Siswowardjo — all of whom are currently serving prison sentences on account of the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

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