

State Terrorism and the Indonesian press: The 1998 reform movement

This paper examines the 1998 reform movement in Indonesia and focuses on the role of the press in exposing state-sponsored terrorism that was perpetuated by the security apparatus of Soeharto's New Order government.

As the reform movement, led by university students, gained momentum in early 1998, the press became increasingly bold in its reporting of the abduction by security forces of anti-government activists and in its reporting of other government abuses of power.

With the Indonesian economy in freefall, the Soeharto New Order government lost control over a press emboldened by the rising tide of anti-government and anti-Soeharto sentiment.

Many writers have acknowledged the key role of students in the reform movement. This paper will explore some of the links between the press, students and other pro-reform activists.

From early 1998 the press were able to put the repressive actions of the New Order firmly on the media agenda and into the public arena. It is argued the press was an active participant in the reform movement and played a key role in the downfall of Soeharto's authoritarian regime and the exposure of state-sanctioned human rights abuses and acts of terror.

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In liberal democratic societies and particularly since the events of September 11, 2001, the word terrorism generally evokes images of radical groups or individuals that carry out acts of violence and intimidation against the state. However, defining terrorism is not an easy task. One person's idea of a terrorist may be another person's freedom fighter.

Understandably, given recent world events, much of the contemporary research tends to focus on anti-state or individual and group terrorism. However, as Wardlaw points out “it is all too easy to focus on outlandish activities of small groups to the exclusion of institutionalised, ‘official’ terrorism practised by a number of readily identifiable regimes” (cited in Vanden, 1989:257). While Wardlaw would surely concede the suicide attacks on the World Trade Centre were considerably more fiendish than ‘outlandish’, his point about state terrorism is particularly relevant.

Throughout history there have been countless examples of state terrorism. The word terrorism is in fact derived from “the era of the French Revolution and the Jacobin dictatorship which used terror as an instrument of political repression and social control” (Freidlander, cited in Vanden: 257).

The incidence and scope of state terrorism is far-reaching. Thackrah argues that “state or governmental terrorism has become far more pervasive and barbaric than individual or group terrorism” (Thackrah, 1989:29).

Without engaging too deeply the debate to define terrorism, this paper adopts Wilkinson’s point that “it is generally accepted in the specialist literature that what distinguishes terrorism from other forms of violence is the deliberate and systematic use of coercive intimidation” (Wilkinson, p. xi). This definition is supported by Crelinsten, who proposes that terrorism is “the deliberate use of violence and threat of violence to evoke a state of fear (or terror) in a particular victim or audience” (Crelinsten, 1989:6).

During Soeharto’s thirty-two year rule in Indonesia, the New Order security apparatus ruthlessly used its wide-ranging powers to threaten, repress, control or eliminate those dissident groups and individuals that could not be coerced, co-opted or silenced. University students, the media and journalists, artists, opposition political figures and their supporters and labour activists were among the many victims targeted by the New Order security apparatus during the Soeharto era.

NEW ORDER TERRORISM DURING THE SOEHARTO ERA

While the press was subjected to strict controls, it regularly pushed the vaguely defined boundaries of what the government deemed acceptable limits of freedom. However, the government’s ability to cancel press publication permits and thereby effectively shut down publications that

did not toe the official line was a constant threat to the press, to editors and journalists.

During Soeharto's rule, many journalist and editors were arrested and jailed. They were also stripped of their PWI (Indonesian Journalists Association) membership, meaning that under Indonesian law they could not work in the mainstream press. It is no surprise that "the Soeharto regime had been described by the Committee to Protect Journalists as a perennial among its' 10 worst enemies'" (Doronila, 2000:xiii).

Following the 1994 bans on

Tempo, Editor and *DeTik*, *Tempo* editor, Goenawan Mohamad, likened the role of an editor in Indonesia to being the pilot in a hijacked plane where if you do anything to upset your hijackers you, your plane and many innocent people will be blown to pieces (Mohamad, 1996:61).

While the analogy may be an unintended reference to one of the most devastating modus operandi of terrorists, Mohamad's statement reflects the fear and uncertainty, and also the reality of the situation that working journalists and editors faced during the Soeharto era.

In addition to 'legal' measures, editors lived with budaya telpon (telephone culture), the dreaded telephone call from the Information Minister, a senior politician or member of the security apparatus advising whether, or how, a particular story should be covered.

Reporting of student demonstrations was generally a taboo subject for the press. Aware of the power of students to galvanise public support, Soeharto's New Order imposed strict sanctions on student political activity and also on press coverage.

The introduction in 1978 by Minister of Education and Culture, Dr Daoed Joesoef, of the Normalisation of Campus Life (Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus, NKK) policy virtually quashed all political activity on university campuses throughout the archipelago. Under Ministerial Decree No. 028 students were banned from undertaking any political activity on campus.

Students feared the consequences of being involved in political activity. Those actually involved, or suspected by the security forces of being involved, in campus political activity risked at the very least expulsion from university. For students, the risks of arrest, prosecution, jail, torture and even death were real threats that acted as strong deterrents.

The government regularly instigated moves to curtail press reporting of student demonstrations, effectively denying students access to the mainstream press and, thereby, access to the public. When in April 1989 Harmoko summoned the editors of six major newspapers and magazines to his office, he warned them “not to report any future student demonstrations in news, commentary or editorials” (Aspinall, 1993:1 – 2). Reports of student protests that did make the press generally relied heavily on the official version of events with the primary sources being government officials and members of the security apparatus rather than student representatives.

Like the press and students, artists and other anti-government activists were also subjected to a form of state-sanctioned terror during the Soeharto era. One of Indonesia’s leading artists, poet and playwright W.S. Rendra, was constantly intimidated by security forces:

“He was jailed in the early days of his career for public readings of his poems and plays, which the government argued could threaten national unity. The government also banned his group from performing for eight years” (*The Jakarta Post*, May 25, 1997:3).

Like Rendra’s experiences with the New Order government, theatre group Teater Koma had two productions banned by the authorities for their critical portrayal of social and political issues. In 1990, “Suksesi, a play about an ambitious woman who wants to assume her father’s powerful position, also lost its performance permit” (*The Jakarta Post*, June 20, 1997:9). The play was an obvious reference to the Soeharto family and the burning issue of presidential succession.

In a June 1997 performance in Jakarta, Teater Koma apologised to the audience for its lack of overt political criticism. An article in

The Jakarta Post highlights the restrictions with which the group must contend and to the fact theatre groups, like the press, were forced to censor their content to avoid state sanctions: “In the opening scene, reference is made to the plight of theatre companies, who must always face the risk of not being able to perform” (*The Jakarta Post*, June 20, 1997:9).

Opposition political figures and their supporters also bore the brunt of the New Order’s repressive acts of terror. At a government-backed

Congress in Medan in June 1996, Megawati was ousted as PDI (Indonesian Democratic Party) leader and replaced by former PDI leader Soerjadi. Megawati had been elected Chairperson in late 1993 and “for the first time in the history of Soeharto’s New Order, a political party was headed by a leader who had not been groomed by the government, indeed, who was elected by party members in defiance of government instructions” (Aspinall, 1996).

Under Megawati’s popular leadership, the PDI posed a serious threat to Golkar and Soeharto’s New Order government. With the May 1997 general election less than a year away, Soeharto needed to reduce the momentum of support for a Megawati-led PDI. Installing their ‘own’ leader of the PDI was the ideal way for the government to not only gain control over the internal machinations of the political party, but installing an unpopular leader also had the effect of drastically reducing grassroots support for the PDI.

In the week prior to the Medan Congress, pro-democracy groups including the Alliance of Independent Journalists and various student groups released a statement in support of Megawati (Aspinall, 1996). The statement was not the first time students and journalists had joined forces. In January 1996, students, journalists, intellectuals and other pro-democracy supporters formed KIPP - The Independent Election Monitoring Committee – to oversee the upcoming May 1997 general election and to prevent or expose fraud (Aspinall, 1996).

Although the congress that led to Megawati’s ousting was unconstitutional, it was evident the government had carefully orchestrated the leadership coup. Newspaper and magazine editors had been called in by Chief Brig-Gen. Amir Syarifudin and instructed to play down the issue and report in a

“manner sympathetic to Megawati’s opponents and the government. This intimidation was largely effective. Most media reported the dispute as if it was merely an internal split in the party, giving little explicit coverage of government intervention” (Aspinall, 1996).

In protest against the congress, Megawati supporters took to the streets of cities and towns around the country, occupying provincial branches of the PDI, incurring the wrath of security forces.

The dispute reached boiling point when, on July 27, members of Soejardi's faction, backed by government troops and hired thugs, took over the PDI headquarters in Jakarta, ousting Megawati supporters and triggering riots that, according to figures released by Indonesia's National Commission on Human Rights, left at least five people dead, 124 injured and 23 missing (*The Jakarta Post*, May 27, 1997:2).

Immediately following the raid on the PDI office and the ensuing riots, "the student movement became the target of extreme repression" (McRae, 2001:5). ABRI Commander, Feisal Tanjung, appeared on national television to threaten "subversive groups associated with the PDI" while Jakarta Military Commander, Maj-Gen. Sutiyoso, ordered "his troops to shoot troublemakers on sight" (Aspinall, 1996). The threats were obviously intended as a stern warning to students and other Megawati supporters.

While the mainstream press may have been tentative in its reporting of the events surrounding the July 27 attack and the riots, a study by Sharon Tickle revealed the news coverage on the Internet was superior to that of two Indonesian newspapers and two authoritative reports (reports by National Commission into Human Rights and the Human Rights Watch/Asia) (Tickle, 1997:11).

Tickle's study is not only a pointed reminder of the control the government had over official channels of information, such as the press and 'independent' bodies, but also indicates the growing importance of the Internet in circumventing government control and the dissemination of information.

THE INTERNET, STUDENTS AND THE PRESS

Many authors stress the significance of the Internet in Soeharto's downfall. In Indonesia, new information technology so seriously undercut the ability of the government to control information that the fall of the authoritarian regime was inevitable (Williams, 2000:4). W. Scott Thompson argues that "this was the first revolution using the Internet" (Marcus, 1998: 73-74) while Diana Lady Dougan is more circumspect in her evaluation of the Internet in Soeharto's downfall, arguing that while the Internet did not change the outcome in Indonesia it "was an escalating factor. It fast-forwarded things" (Marcus, 1998:75).

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine in detail the role of the Internet in the 1998 reform movement, it is important to briefly discuss

the links between the Internet, the press, students, journalists, artists and other reform advocates.

As Sen and Hill point out, the freedom of the Internet “became a constant reminder of the absence of openness and freedom in other media” (Sen and Hill, 2000:210). The banned weekly,

Tempo, re-emerged on the Internet on March 6, 1996, as *Tempo Interaktif* and in its May 3 edition, editorialised that although the sources of information could be traced and banned, the rapid development of Internet technology would make attempts at censorship increasingly less efficient (Woods, 1996:28).

It had become common practice for students to download politically sensitive and anti-government information from the Internet, then photocopy and disseminate it to a larger audience. With the proliferation of Internet cafes (Warnet) and the number of Internet users in Indonesia having increased from 2,000 in 1994 to an estimated more than 40,000 users in 1997 (*The Jakarta Post*, May 25, 1997:1) the potential for pro-reform activists to spread their message, and to organise and collaborate, also increased proportionately.

Indonesia’s mainstream daily newspapers also contributed to the promotion of the Internet. As Sen and Hill (2000:196) point out, major dailies including *Kompas*,

Media Indonesia and *Republika* had regular columns and features devoted to the Internet and associated computer technology.

The Jakarta Post ran regular stories and features about the Internet that effectively advertised website addresses, including pro-Megawati homepage *PDI Perjuangan* and *apakabar*, a free Internet-based mailing list that provided anti-government critics with a wealth of information. Through these sites people could access “prohibited, unsanctioned or even banned material not generally available to the public” (*The Jakarta Post*, May 25, 1997:1).

The outlawed Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), the illegal journalists union formed in the wake of the bans on *Tempo*, *DeTik* and *Editor* as an alternative to the government-approved PWI (Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia – Indonesian Journalists Association), began using the Internet to publish online its banned publication *Suara Independen* (Woods, 1996:28). Many ex-*Tempo* journalists also “set about trying to create a genuine political movement, studying pro-democracy movements

elsewhere and establishing networks of their own” (Harsono, 2000:83).

The Internet was also used as a source of information for many journalists and their news organisations as well as providing an outlet for banned journalists to write for overseas publications. A number of Indonesian journalists joined the *apakabar* mailing list and used it to distribute their news reports, free from the censorship of the mainstream media (Harsono, 2000:83).

Artists used the Internet to advertise and co-ordinate Ruwatan Bumi '98 (Earth Exorcism '98). This cultural movement, organised by a number of regional committees through the Internet, was “designed to heal the nation’s woes Ö (and) to use art as the medium of liberation, to reinvigorate the badly bruised political consciousness of the Indonesian people” (Clark, 1998:38). In April 1998, more than 170 performances took place across Indonesia with many artists also giving public addresses at student campus rallies (Clark, 1998:38).

THE GATHERING PACE OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT

In March 1998, an article in the magazine *Detektif dan Romantika* referred to the student movement as “the largest student movement in Indonesian history” (Aspinall, 1999:215). Throughout the early months of 1998, press coverage of the student movement and other reform groups increased dramatically both in terms of editorial space allocated and in the depth of coverage. While in the past the press, and other media, had been under pressure from the government to conform to the official government line, dissident voices were now being heard through Indonesia’s media.

The economic crisis was impacting on all but Indonesia’s elite, and through coverage of the economic and political crisis the press was able to covet the views of students, academics, opposition political figures like Amien Rais and Megawati, NGO spokespeople and anyone else willing to speak out against the government’s failure to manage Indonesia’s economic crisis.

Economic development had been the key to Soeharto’s survival throughout his 32-year rule. But with the economy in freefall, Soeharto’s political justification evaporated as popular dissent against the authoritarian regime became increasingly overt and aggressive. As Harsono (2000:85) points out, the people had realised “what point bowing to draconian political controls when the rice bowl was now empty”.

Throughout the early months of 1998 there are numerous examples that indicate that the press were willing allies in the reform movement, supporting students and academics by reporting stories and photos of the student movement, publishing their demands and publishing opinion pieces by academics that were critical of Soeharto's New Order government and supportive of the students. Student representatives were increasingly used as sources for news stories while the press also lent editorial support to students and, in some instances, members of the media joined with students at rallies and demonstrations.

In the first few days of 1998, The Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) released a statement accusing the government and ABRI of failing to uphold human rights. Soeharto had always maintained that human rights in Indonesia had a different meaning to that espoused in Western-style democracies.

With the March session of the MPR looming, at which Indonesia's president would be elected, the timing of the story is important. There was an impending sense of inevitability in Indonesia that Soeharto would be re-elected for his seventh term.

Many opposition figures, anti-government activists, and students had disappeared in the past, reportedly abducted by government security forces. Historically, security clampdowns throughout the term of Soeharto's New Order rule increased in intensity in the lead-up to both general and presidential elections. By publishing the YLBHI claims that the government had failed to "accommodate the universality of human rights as stipulated in the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights" (*The Jakarta Post*, January 2, 1998:2), the press were able to put human rights abuses on the media agenda and into the public arena.

The willingness of the press to publish stories about government-initiated human rights abuses, brutality and kidnappings of activists by security forces, put the spotlight on ABRI as its actions were scrutinised in the press in an unprecedented manner.

Following Soeharto's confirmation late January that he would run for a seventh term as president, the press ran a range of stories coveting the responses of various people. In political polls conducted by students at Yogyakarta's prestigious Gadjah Mada University, ninety percent of students polled rejected the idea that the MPR nominate Soeharto for a seventh term as president and "these polls were publicised through the Indonesian media, both electronic (private television) and printed mass

media (newspapers, weekly tabloids and news magazines)” (Bhakti, 1998:174).

On March 2, thousands of students from major campuses on Java and Sulawesi rallied on campus to protest against rising prices and to demand political reform. As was becoming an increasingly familiar trend, the rallies were covered in Indonesia’s press. *The Jakarta Post* March 3 edition ran a story that carried details of the various protests, including the demands of the students, quotes from student leaders and photos of the student rallies.

The Jakarta Post reported that in Bandung students clashed with security authorities after they tried to take their protest to the streets by “forcing their way through a police and military blockade” (*The Jakarta Post*, March 3, 1998:3). Although the students are initially portrayed as the aggressors, the story reveals “the dispute was sparked by security officers who started to push and beat the students Ö” (*The Jakarta Post*, March 3, 1998:3).

By blaming the violence on security forces, *The Jakarta Post* is showing its willingness to cast off the shackles of self-censorship and, significantly, illustrating that although it risks incurring the wrath of the government it is willing to publish examples of the heavy-handed tactics used by security forces against students.

The same story also includes an example of the overt support given to students by the media. At a University of Indonesia rally in Jakarta, which ended “peacefully under the watchful eyes of dozens of police and military personnel”, media personnel in attendance showed their true colours: “Seconds after the rally ended, a heavily packed antiriot truck arrived at the campus to a chorus of boos from the students and media” (*The Jakarta Post*, March 3, 1998:3).

University staff, rectors and other intellectuals were becoming increasingly open in their support for the student movement. As Aspinall points out, intellectuals played a significant role in the reform movement:

“On some campuses, alumni associations and teaching staff initiated the first protests and most student demonstrations were addressed and actively supported by rectors, deans and other members of academic staff” (1998, p. 144).

Similarly,

The Jakarta Post reported that student rallies throughout Indonesia during the previous two weeks were “strongly supported by the school’s deans and lecturers” (*The Jakarta Post*, March 6, 1998, p. 2).

Chairman of the Institute for the Study of the Press and Development, Ignatius Haryanto, drew attention to the failure of the government to silence the student voice despite systematic steps during the past twenty years to depoliticise higher education. He also endorsed the student protests and slated the government, asserting that “students embody the collective aspirations of society (and) it is therefore fitting they show concern in a time of crisis”, while also pointing out that “the behaviour of the authorities has continuously declined and is now intolerable” (*The Jakarta Post*, March 16, 1998, p. 5).

Like Haryanto, Gadjah Mada alumnus, A. Wisnuhardana, also used the opinion pages of the press to point out “there is a relationship between radical student sentiment and repressive, domineering and careless political actions taken by the establishment” and to warn that “university students will continue to act as a buffer to state domination of the public” (*The Jakarta Post*, March 16, 1998:5).

In a three-week period to April 5, more than one hundred student activists had been injured on campuses across Indonesia (*The Jakarta Post*, April 6, 1998, p. 1). A number of student and political activists had also disappeared, reportedly at the hands of security forces.

The press were regularly reporting on the conduct of the security forces in their handling of student protests and on the missing activists, publishing details of those missing and giving editorial support to students and lawyers who were calling for the National Commission on Human Rights to investigate the violence and the reported abductions.

The Jakarta Post reported that there had been a “string of unsolved disappearances of vocal non-government critics and activists” that included Pius Lustrilang, the secretary of SIAGA (an association that supports government critics including Megawati and Amien Rais) who had “been missing since Feb. 3, one day after being visited by military intelligence officers” (*The Jakarta Post*, April 6, 1998, p. 2). *The Jakarta Post* also reported that, among the activists reported missing, Gadjah Mada, student and chairman of the Indonesian Student Solidarity for Democracy, Andi Arief, was “reportedly abducted from his brother’s house in Lampung last month” (*The Jakarta Post*, April 6, 1998, p. 2).

The editorial of April 8, while careful not to directly accuse the military and police institutions as a whole as being responsible for the abductions alludes to the New Order's track record when dealing with anti-government activists:

“Sadly, it has to be said that reports of missing persons following clashes between protesters and security officers are not unusual. On the contrary, it is difficult to avoid the impression that such disappearances in the wake of public protests are becoming something of an established phenomenon. Under the circumstances it is easy – one could almost say natural – to suspect the state security apparatus of having a hand in the disappearances”
(*The Jakarta Post*, April 8, 1998, p. 4).

While the possibility was raised in the editorial that the activists may have gone into hiding or that “some misguided officers” may have been involved, the editor called on the state security apparatus to resolve the missing activists cases, and punish those responsible, pointing out that “the guarantee of personal safety, fair treatment and protection by the state are among the most basic rights of every citizen” (*The Jakarta Post*, April 8, 1998, p. 4).

When missing activist Pius Lustrilang was released by his captors in early April, the story was front-page news. Pius was quoted as saying the only reason “he was released (was) on the condition that he would not tell anyone, especially the media, about his experiences. He said his abductors had threatened to kill him if he did” (*The Jakarta Post*, April 29, 1998:1).

The Jakarta Post gave the story extensive coverage. When Pius testified about his ordeal to the National Commission on Human Rights, *The Jakarta Post* published the shocking details of his time in captivity, including Pius' revelations that he was threatened at gunpoint, beaten, repeatedly given electric shocks, and kept blindfolded and handcuffed for much of the two months he was detained (*The Jakarta Post*, April 29, 1998:1; *The Jakarta Post*, April 30, 1998:1).

In editorials it was lamented that the spate of disappearances since February had evoked fears that, like in some South American military regimes two decades earlier, “officially sanctioned elimination of opposition member could happen here” (*The Jakarta Post*, April 29, 1998:4).

Following his testimony to the National Commission on Human Rights, Pius left Indonesia for Holland, fearing for his safety should he remain in Indonesia. In *The Jakarta Post* May 1 editorial, the author wrote that for many Indonesians Pius' revelations

“paint a rather grizzly Kafkaesque picture of what life can be like for people whose views differ from those in power (and that) Ö the description which Pius gave us of his ordeal was one of life in a country ruled by force instead of the law” (p. 4).

In an April 30 statement, which was released after the Commission had received testimony from a number of activists who had been released, the National Commission on Human Rights concluded that the abductions were carried out by a well organised group and that there was “a growing perception among the public that there is a possibility that the state security apparatus was involved” (*The Jakarta Post*, May 1, 1998:1).

During the last six weeks of Soeharto's rule, press criticism of the government reached unprecedented levels. Student demonstrations, with photos of students holding banners bearing anti-government slogans, were front-page news, much to the chagrin of Minister of Education and Culture, Wiranto Arismunander, who bitterly complained to the press “about the undue media coverage of student demonstrations, and the scant attention given to his policy” (*The Jakarta Post*, April 16, 1998:1).

The government had lost control over information management as the press openly called for reform. As Amien Rais commented, by May 1998 Soeharto “knew all the mass media were against him” (Rais, 1998). With many of Soeharto's supporters now conceding the need for reform in the wake of overwhelming public pressure, the political and military elite began to fragment as Soeharto tried to maintain his now tenuous hold on power.

The fatal shooting by security forces of four University students at Trisakti University on May 12 was one of the defining moments of the reform movement and one of the most significant events that led to Soeharto's downfall.

The killings received extensive media coverage that helped to galvanise the student movement and stir the public to revolt:

“Media representations of the victims often stressed these respectable and devout middle-class

backgrounds. Interviews with distraught parents, photographs of the victims surrounded by neatly clad family members, and reports of their youthful middle-class idiosyncrasies, hobbies and aspirations filled the press and were among the most powerful mobilising factors of 1998” (Aspinall, 1999:232).

On May 13, the day after the shootings, thousands of mourners gathered at Trisakti University in a rally to honour the four dead students. Prominent political figures and artists, including Megawati, Amien Rais, and W. S. Rendra, along with leading academics and Trisakti rector, MudantoMartejo, addressed the gathering urging students to continue the fight for reform (*The Jakarta Post*, May 14, 1998:1,2).

The slain students became martyrs. News magazine *Gatra* dubbed them ‘Pahlawan Reformasi’ (Heroes of reformation) (Aspinall, 1999:217) while *The Jakarta Post* May 14 front-page headline read “Students honour ‘reform heroes’” (1998:1). Even the official government television station, TVRI (Televisi Republik Indonesia), broadcast a statement of condolence from station staff the day after the killings (Aspinall, 1998:144) and “repeatedly ran a eulogy Ö galvanising public awareness of the tragedy in Jakarta, and indicating that those at the top were no longer in control” (Harsono, 2000:85 – 86). A week later TVRI broadcast a news report that “attributed Soeharto’s resignation to the ‘wave of reformasi pioneered by the students’” (Aspinall, 1999:218).

The riots that erupted throughout Indonesia in the wake of the Trisakti killings resulted in huge casualties, with estimates of more than a thousand people killed in Jakarta alone (Aspinall, and van Klinken, 1998:165). The wide-scale property destruction left Jakarta resembling a war zone as business in Jakarta ground to a standstill.

On May 18, thousands of students, supported by academics, artists and political figures, occupied the buildings and grounds at the DPR vowing to stay until Soeharto resigned. By May 20 the number had swelled to an estimated fifty thousand. Students displayed anti-Soeharto banners and anti-Soeharto pamphlets littered the DPR buildings and courtyard (Forrester, 1998:64 – 65). Students using laptop computers were sending out news online from inside the DPR complex while mainstream press reports continued to echo the sentiments of those in the media, students and other pro-reform advocates that were calling for Soeharto’s resignation.

Succumbing to overwhelming public and political pressure, Soeharto resigned on the morning of May 21 and vice-President Habibie was sworn in as Indonesia's third president.

New Minister of Information, Yunus Yosfiah, eased restrictions on the press, simplified licensing procedures and removed the ban on the AJI. *The Jakarta Post* editor, Susanto Pudjomartono, said the reform movement had given the press a positive momentum to help free itself from decades of oppression and that journalists and editors needed to free themselves from the mental prison they had constructed after years of self-censorship brought about by decades of strict controls on their work (Harsono, 1998:16).

In the months following Soeharto's resignation, the media published a plethora of stories implicating government security forces in a range of acts of terror and human rights abuses. Kopassus, formerly commanded by Soeharto's son-in-law, Lt. Gen. Prabowo Subianto, Kostrad, and the Jakarta Military Command were also implicated in planning and orchestrating the May 1998 riots. Prabowo was later discharged from the armed forces by Minister of Security and Defence/ABRI Chief, Gen. Wiranto, for his involvement in the abduction and torture of political activists (*The Jakarta Post*, October 10, 1998:2).

Reports that senior members of the New Order government and former president Soeharto, his family and friends had engaged in corruption, collusion and nepotism also became standard fare for the press. When Soeharto appeared on his daughter's television station to deny allegations he had wealth stashed overseas, "a vitriolic editorial in an Indonesian newspaper the following day underscored how the media's unbridled coverage of unfolding events had become a new element in the equation (McBeth, 1999:25).

By the end of 1998,

"the Armed Forces' leadership found itself squarely on the defensive, struggling to preserve a political role and answer charges that it engaged in systematic torture, kidnapping, rape and murder in its efforts to maintain the Soeharto dictatorship" (Bourchier, 1999:149).

Since 1998, the press has kept human rights issues on the media agenda and in the public arena, adopting a watchdog role and regularly publishing

stories about new developments into the cases of a number of missing activists and the ongoing investigations.

Today, more than four years on, the press continue to publish stories about state acts of terror and human rights abuses that occurred during the Soeharto era. Stories that would not have seen the light of day for fear of government retaliation during Soeharto's reign, have become an accepted staple for Indonesia's press.

The press, and media in general, played a significant role in the 1998 reform movement. The reward is an unprecedented level of freedom. The challenge is to defend the freedom while maintaining integrity and objectivity.

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