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## Media and Press Freedom in Indonesia Explored

QUEZON CITY—Indonesia, among the 11 Southeast Asian nations including the Philippines, possesses a media landscape shaped by different historical and contemporary political, economic, and sociocultural factors.

An hour-long discussion with Diponegoro University (Undip) Lecturer Dr. Nurul Hasfi held last August 22 provided students at Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU) with insights into the past and current condition of the Indonesian press.

ADMU students taking up COMM 76: Introduction to Journalism under Luz R. Rimban were able to learn more about the state of the media environment in Indonesia through a presentation prepared by Dr. Hasfi, followed by a question-and-answer segment.

Dr. Hasfi, a member of the Society of Asian Journalists (SAJ), earned a Bachelor's degree in Communication from Undip, a Master's degree in Communication from ADMU, and a doctoral degree in Sociology from Gadjah Mada University (UGM). The Undip lecturer has conducted extensive research and authored journals and books covering issues related to journalism, new media sociology, and political communication within the context of Indonesia.

### *Indonesian Press Under and Post-Suharto*

Suharto, the second president in Indonesian history, has ruled with 32 years of authoritarian regime marked with corruption, nepotism, and lack of press freedom. An article published in the Third World Quarterly journal in 1999 highlighted that despite the guarantee of a free press, as stipulated in the 1982 Press Law at the time, the Indonesian press had been subject to strict control. The government banned publications without the need for court intervention, forcing journalists to engage in self-censorship.

After Suharto stepped down from his presidency, the number of media outlets bloomed. Dr. Hasfi characterized this period as “euphoria of [the] media.” According to Media Landscapes, an organization formed in collaboration with the European Journalism Centre (EJC) and the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (OCW), the 1982 Press Law underwent an amendment in 1999 which marked a crucial step in the process of the country's media democratization. Through Law Number 40 of the 1999 Press Law, the Indonesian Press Council was established as an independent institution with the goal of safeguarding the state of the national press and promoting press independence.

### *Media Ownership in Indonesia*

Dr. Hasfi, on the current issues of media ownership in the country, said that the “variety of narrative[s] in Indonesia is very low.” A report based on the research funded by the Ford

Foundation Indonesia Office cited 12 media groups that “have a stronghold on the media landscape, controlling 100% of national commercial television shares, owning five of the six newspapers with the highest circulation, dominating the most popular online news media outlets and entertainment radio networks.” Dr. Hasfi’s discussion highlighted how the lack of media pluralism has allowed media conglomerates to control the narrative presented to the public, shape content, and promote political propaganda that aligns with the private interests of the owners.

However, the oligarchic structure of the media landscape in Indonesia has pushed alternative media such as Konde.co and Magdalene.co—both of which focus on discussing and raising awareness on women’s issues—to rise. Despite this, as emphasized in an article by Masduki and Leen D’ Haenen published in the *International Journal of Communication* in 2022, diversity of media sources and viewpoints in Indonesia is undoubtedly facing a massive threat due to the prevailing high degree of media ownership concentration.

Dr. Hasfi, in addition to providing insights into the Indonesian press—its historical and present contexts—has emphasized that both the past and current challenges facing their country and the Philippines are comparable. “Indonesia and the Philippine journalism systems are quite similar,” said the Undip lecturer. Both have experienced authoritarian regimes and currently contend with the challenge of select conglomerates controlling their media landscapes, as well as facing frequent attacks on their press and journalists. Indonesia and the Philippines are bonded by their pursuit of protecting free and diverse press, a crucial aspect of any functioning democracy.