

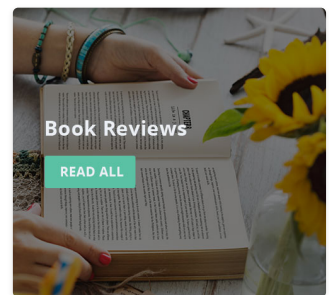
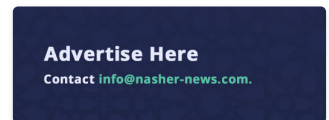
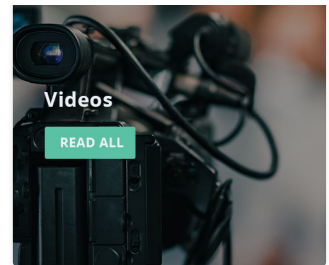
Grim picture of publishing in Vietnam

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Vietnam is a mini China, a one party Leninist state in which state censorship and self-censorship is rife and citizens live in fear of the police whose modus operandi has much to owe to the worst days of East Germany. That was a summary of the country given by the Vietnamese American activist Will Nguyen in a powerful session at the Frankfurt Book Fair on freedom to publish.

“Article 25 of the Vietnamese constitution says there is freedom to publish,” he continued. “But in reality you cannot publish material that threatens the party in power. Literacy rates are high, but political literacy is low – people do not know the names of their representatives, nor do they understand concepts like the rule of law.”



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in Vietnam. "You cannot criticize the General Secretary of the Communist Party, the president, the prime minister or the speaker of the House," he said. "Everyone fears the government."

Nguyen said that fear was "the glue that holds the system together. The police are modelled on the Stasi from East Germany. Police keep files on everyone and there is extensive use of CCTV. However, because of a lack of resources it is less efficient than in China."

But there was a hint of optimism. Long noted that change was inevitable. "Vietnam doesn't have much choice," he said. "It will have to open up to democratic countries for economic development, it will have to become more open and respect the rule of law and human rights - it will become a free country in time."

The session included a moving pre-recorded address by the author and journalist and co-founder of Liberal Publishing House, Pham Doan Trang, who was arrested on 6 October. She has received the IPA's Prix Voltaire, its freedom to publish prize, and described in her address the difficulties faced by those who choose to publish work critical of the government or calling for democracy. "We have to move from place to place, we cannot buy printing machinery because it will be picked up by CCTV, so our publishing is about hand-gluing the books. Book delivery is dangerous too. The police can disguised themselves as booksellers and make an arrest. Two book-shippers were arrested and tortured."

She concluded her address with these words: "Books are not simply books for us - books mean our lives, books means freedom."

