

Media in Pakistan (1988-1999) an Overview

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Abstract

The freedom of media is a substantial responsibility that a democratic government has to fulfill. Each government in Pakistan from 1988 to 1999 has attempted to curb this freedom. Violence against journalists has been reported time and again. The relationship between media and government plays a key role in informing people about the performance of the government. As representative of the people the government is responsible to them in a democratic set up, but governments have generally described stories against the performance of governments, or role of opposition as yellow journalism. The study presents the status of press in this decade by means of published and in person interviews of politicians who were part of policy making. The writings of important journalists are incorporated as well.

Introduction

The purpose of the article is to look into the condition of media (print and electronic) during civilian elected governments from 1988 to 1999 in Pakistan. The study takes in four civilian governments – Benazir Bhutto's first government (2 December 1988 - 6 August 1990),¹ Nawaz Sharif's first government (6 November 1990 - 18 July 1993),² Benazir's

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¹ In 1988, the Pakistan People Party (PPP) established its government at the centre with the help of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and 21 independents and Ghulam Ishaq Khan was appointed as the President. *Dawn*, 3 December 1988. Also see R. A. Singh, *Military Governance in Pakistan* (Delhi: Raj Publications, 2007), p.100. Omar Noman, *Pakistan: A Political and Economic History Since 1947* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1988), p.219.

² In 1990 elections the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) surfaced as the only largest party in the National Assembly. It bagged 106 seats in the house of 207. *Report on General Elections 1993*, Vol.1 (Islamabad: Election Commission of Pakistan, n.d.), p.4.

second government (19 October 1993 - 5 November 1996),³ Nawaz's second government (17 February 1997 - 12 October 1999).⁴

Media in Pakistan: 1947-1988

This section presents a brief history about the status of media under elected governments and dictatorships in Pakistan. It highlights the methods used by governments to curb the freedom of media and condition of media under different governments and martial laws.

Controlled press has been one of the persistent features of Pakistani society.⁵ Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the first Governor General, was great supporter of freedom of press and expression, and human rights. While addressing Muslim journalists on 13 March 1947 in Bombay, he said: 'I expect you to be completely fearless, if I go wrong for that matter, the League goes wrong in any direction of its policy or programme, I want you to criticize it honestly as its friend, in fact, as one who whose heart is beating with Muslim nation'.⁶ In Jinnah's life no legislation had transpired to suppress the freedom of press, but just after month of his death, in October 1948, the Public Safety Ordinance was implemented. In 1952 it was adopted by the parliament and became a permanent part of the 1956 constitution.⁷

³ The formula of power sharing was provided by the caretaker government to bring about the formation of federal government for the reason that split mandate engendered indecisive party position in the lower house. The formula suggested the coalition at the centre which was frowned on by both Pakistan People Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) popularly known as PML (N). This was the first time ever in the parliamentary history of Pakistan that nomination papers were submitted for the Prime Minister's elections; premier was previously nominated by the President. In 1993, the PPP had set up its government in coalition with the Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDA), the Jamhoori Wattan Party (JWP), independents and minorities. 1993. *The News*, Islamabad, 12 October 1993. *Dawn*, 16 October 1993. *Dawn*, Islamabad, 14 October 1993. S. A. Sayood, 'Pakistan Peoples Party', *Pakistan Political Perspective*, 2:2 (November 1993), Islamabad, Institute of Policy Studies, p.19.

⁴ In the National Assembly elections 1997 PML (N) acquired two-third majority and eventually installed its government.

⁵ 'Press under Threat', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34:5 (January-February 1999), p.245, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4407592>

⁶ Zamir Niazi, *The Press in Chains*, Zubeida Mustafa (ed.), 2nd rev. ed. (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.57, 62.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.63. Zafar Iqbal, 'Pakistan's Press and Politics in First Decade (1947-58): An Analysis in Structural-Functionalist Perspective', *Journal of Political Studies*, Lahore, Vol.XVII (2010), p.114.

During the tenure of Governor General Ghulam Muhammad the Public Safety Ordinance 1948, Pakistan Security Act 1952 and Official Secrets Act 1923 were re-implemented. These laws were used as a tool to threaten the newspapers and force them to write in favour of the government. The press took notice of such dictatorial steps and declared it against fundamental rights. The culture of bribe in journalism was initiated in this regime to stop them from publishing stories against the government. In the tenure of Khawaja Nazimuddin the freedom of press was restricted, repeatedly Central powers Act was put into action against the newspaper of Maulana Zafar Ali Khan namely, daily *Zamindar*. In 1953, martial law was imposed in Lahore and press was used to support it. Iskandar Mirza had followed the footstep of his predecessors to keep press under his strict control. He controlled press by making it financially vulnerable. The government had put restrictions on official advertisement and newsprint, besides imposing fines on newspapers. Quite a lot of newspapers were shut down for different time durations. The courts had disapproved government's unlawful restrictions on press and ruled the release of editors and withdrawal of fines on newspapers.⁸

During Ayub Khan's regime initially media was extensively used against politicians and afterwards to propagate the achievements of his regime. On April 1959 he enforced a Martial Law Ordinance to confiscate the newspapers that had published material through which the security of Pakistan could be endangered.⁹ Ayub Khan had controlled freedom of press through promulgation of Press and Publication Ordinance (PPO) in 1962. The law had empowered the authority to confiscate any newspaper and seize journalists. Through these laws Ayub nationalized massive parts of the press and took control of the largest news agency.¹⁰ The freedom of press was also hampered by the two provincial ordinances namely West Pakistan Press and Publications Ordinance of 1963 and the Press and Publications (East Pakistan Second Amendment) Ordinance, 1963. These ordinances empowered government to shut down the press that print affronted literature and also to take over the journal and newspapers. It elaborated that if the publication included any sign or expression (directly or indirectly) to

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.114, 117-119.

⁹ Victoria Schofield (ed.), *Old Roads, New Highways: Fifty Years of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.182.

¹⁰ *Between Radicalisation and Democratisation in an Unfolding Conflict: Media in Pakistan: Report* (Copenhagen: International Media Support, 2009) http://www.i-s.dk/files/publications/1491%20Pakistan_final.web.pdf accessed on: 27-1-2012; K.M. Shariff (ed.), *Pakistan Al-Manar 2006-2007: Essential Data on Pakistan* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 2007), p.27.

create abhorrence between the two wings or government and perpetuate adversities then it would be revoked.¹¹

In 1964 the National Press Trust (NPT) was set up with the objective of promoting national outlook and healthy journalism.¹² During the election campaign of 1964-65, presidential elections the Radio Pakistan had adopted the policy of 'blackout on the opposition viewpoint' and attempted to decrease the coverage of Fatima Jinnah. In this regard a special program was launched from Lahore Radio entitled *Massi Mehru* to ridicule women's participation in the elections.¹³

Throughout Ayub's period press was under strong control of the government. The attacks on newspaper offices and journalists were more frequent during last quarter of his rule.¹⁴ The press was controlled and more and more stopped from giving fair share of coverage to the opposition activities. On 25 November 1968, the Pakistan Union of Journalists with the collaboration of Pakistan Federation of Unions of Journalists observed a Journalism day with the purpose to enlighten people that the government had disallowed them from ushering the truth to the world. Throughout the regime press was prohibited from reporting stories related to unrests.¹⁵

When Yahya Khan took power, he prohibited the newspapers from publishing criticism against his regime, but, after nine months of coming to power, Yahya promulgated Military Law Regulations (MLR) 60 owing to which political activities were restored from January 1, 1970. This MLR had taken notice of threats and violence against press. It tried to curb increasing political pressure and political influence on press and strived to stop political interference in the functioning of press.¹⁶ The government also liberalized the policy regarding issue of licences to the newspapers. On 5 May 1969 the district magistrates were empowered to

¹¹ Khalid Bin Sayeed, *The Political System of Pakistan* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), pp.60-61, 123.

¹² The NPT was formed under the direction of Ayub Khan in 1964. The NPT had the ownership of following newspapers: *Morning News* (Karachi), *The Pakistan Times* (Lahore), *Imroze* (Lahore and Multan) and *Mashriq* (Lahore, Karachi and Peshawar). Rafi Raza, *Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Pakistan 1947-1977* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.151.

¹³ Tahir Kamran, *Democracy and Governance in Pakistan* (Lahore: South Asia Partnership, 2008), p.51.

¹⁴ Zamir Niazi, *The Press under Siege* (Karachi: Karachi Press Club, 1992), pp.17-18.

¹⁵ Muneeb Ahmad, *Political Sociology: Perspectives in Pakistan* (Lahore: Punjab Adbi Markaz, 1978), p.16.

¹⁶ Zamir Niazi, *The Press under Siege*, op.cit., p.25.

withdraw the cases regarding licenses without reference to the central information ministry.¹⁷

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto also promised to guarantee freedom to the press but in his tenure several newspapers were banned and attacked. In addition editors, publishers and printers were forbidden from performing their functions. Then Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leaders launched campaigns against newspapers whenever any news was published against their party. Violence against press was the most persistent attribute of this era too.¹⁸ Formerly, Bhutto had opposed the NPT, but his government he did not abolish it; he also needed partisan (pro-PPP) media.¹⁹ Restriction on media was the most obvious feature of the government. It was strongly condemned by the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA).²⁰

During 1977 elections the official media was extremely partial. The political parties like the Jamait-e-Ulema-e Pakistan (Sahebzada Group), JUP (S), the Jamait-ul-Ulema-i-Islam (Haqqi Group), the Jamait ul Ulema-i-Islam (Hazarvi Group) and JUI (H) that endorsed the PPP got privileged dealing from the media. The speeches and statements of the leaders of these parties were regularly broadcasted on radio and television.²¹ After the elections of 1977 official media presented Bhutto as awe-inspiring and painted opposition as foes of democracy.²²

In the course of Muhammad Ziaul Haq's regime the dreadful amendments were brought in the PPO that made the publisher answerable to the government and empowered the government to do the trial of publisher in case a factually correct story was not appreciated by the administration.²³ Zia policies played an important role in further deteriorating the state of press. Through MLRs 48 and 49, laws, ordinances and amendments in the section 499 and 500 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) restrictions were imposed on the press. Several journalists were arrested and newspaper offices were closed.²⁴ During

¹⁷ Zamir Niazi, *The Press in Chains*, *op.cit.*, p.199.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.29-33.

¹⁹ Rafi Raza, *op.cit.*, p.151.

²⁰ Mohammad Waseem, *Politics and the State in Pakistan* (Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 1989), p.33.

²¹ *Summary of White Papers on Misuse of Media: (December 20, 1971-July 4, 1977)*, Government of Pakistan, 1978, pp.26-7.

²² *Summary of White Papers on Misuse of Media*, *op.cit.*, p.51.

²³ *Media in Pakistan: Report*, *op.cit.*, pp.15-16.

²⁴ Zafar Iqbal and Ghulam Shabir, 'Press-Government Relations in Structural-Functionalist Perspective: A Case of Pakistan under General Zia (from 1977 to 1988)', *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, Multan, 30:1 (September

1977-1988 media was under state control and massive television campaigns were launched against the PPP.²⁵ Interestingly all the media laws in Pakistan have been promulgated by military regimes. That is why they were not debated in the national parliament. In this regime media was extensively used against politicians, particularly the PPP leadership.²⁶

Media in Pakistan: 2 December 1988 - 6 August 1990

In May, 1988, the Federal Shariat Court²⁷ ruled quite a few provisions of

2010), pp.170, 172-73. Wajahat Masood, *Militants' Media in Pakistan: Political Etymology and Professional Craft* (Islamabad: Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, 2010), p.4.

²⁵ Ijaz Shafi Gilani, *Media Ethics Country Paper on Pakistan* (Islamabad: Gilani Research Foundation, 2000), p.10.

²⁶ Marco Mezzera, and Saifdar Sial, *Media and Governance in Pakistan: A Controversial Yet Essential Relationship* (Clingendael: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2010), pp.12, 33.

²⁷ On 8 April 1984 the Federal Shariat Court gave its verdict on the petition filed by Tamseel Javed against the Federation of Pakistan and Ministry of Law. The petition challenged the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance XXXV of 1959 West Pakistan applicable to North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), the Sindh Crime Control Act IV of 1974, the Prevention of Anti-National Activities Act VII of 1974, the Security of Pakistan Act XXXV of 1952 and West Pakistan Press and Publications Ordinance XXX 1963. The court's judgement declared that media is free to express the opinion about affairs of the state with the view not to violate the framework of law. The aforementioned decision was made on the basis of Islamic declaration for mass media provided by Islamic Press Union. The main theme of the declaration states that:

Islam lays great emphasis on freedom of expression and human dignity. It not only gives people the right to dissent but makes it obligatory on them to protest against tyranny, injustice and oppression. Islam's precepts in this connection are specific and clearly spelt out in the Quran and the practices and saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Islam aims at creating a disciplined society where the rights and obligations of the individuals are in harmony with the broader interests of the community.

These rights and obligations cannot be curtailed, abrogated, suspended or transgressed by individuals, governments or any other institution.

On appeal from the judgement (the Federal Shariat Court1984) the Shariat Appellate Bench declared article 203-D (1) contrary to injunctions of Islam as laid down by the *Quran*, Holy Prophet and *Sunnah*. The Shariat Appellate Bench gave this judgment on 20 January 1988. *Federation of Pakistan v. Tamseel Javed*, Federal Shariat Court of Pakistan (1988). For

the Press Ordinance contrary to Islam and decided if the ordinance did not amend them then they would lapse after the expiration of three months. On 2 December 1988 Benazir made her maiden speech as Prime Minister of Pakistan in which she promised to annul all the laws that were against the freedom of media. She promised to make press, radio and television free so that they could serve the masses.²⁸ Interestingly, the Press Ordinance 1988 was never brought before the National Assembly by the PPP government. The ordinance was reissued many times in January 1989, May 1989, November 1989, April 1990 and November 1990. A long list of rules was issued for newspapers publishers and editors. In some cases the forfeit of publications came about first and victims were asked to explain their action afterwards.

In 1989 the Council of Newspaper Editors proposed amendments and set up a proposal to implement the code of ethics besides a press court of honour to make possible for the government to fall in the punitive clauses of the ordinance. These suggestions were never heard in the latter half of the PPP government for the press was free than ever and laws to curb the freedom of press were not put into action.²⁹ The resumption of political activities and restoration of free press and civil liberties transpired too.³⁰ But the radio and television were politically partisans. They outright sided with the party in government. Even the politicians of the opposition like Wali Khan, Nasrullah Khan, Mustafa Jatoi, Maulana Abdul Satar Khan Niazi, Omar Farooq and Chudhary Shujat Hussain demonstrated against the detrimental role of the media towards the opposition.³¹

Media in Pakistan: 6 November 1990 – 18 July 1993

By and large, the media in Pakistan has been beleaguered by the political activists at all times. In March 1991 Mohajir Qaumi Movement (Altaf) in

further details see Javed Jabbar, and Qazi Faez Isa (comp.), *Mass Media Laws and Regulations in Pakistan* (Karachi: Asian Media Information and Communication Centre, 1997), pp.779-89.

²⁸ Inam Aziz, *Stop Press: A Life in Journalism*, (trans.) Khalid Hasan (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.167.

²⁹ Attar Chand, *Pakistan: In Search of Modernization* (New Delhi: Anmol Publishers, 1992), pp.398-99.

³⁰ Kalim Bahadur, *Democracy in Pakistan: Crises and Conflicts* (Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1988), p.125; Babar Ali, 'Benazir: Five Months On', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24:22 (June 1989), p.1216, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4394894>

³¹ Muhammad Farooq Qureshi, *Nawaz Sharif: Aik Hukmaran-Aik Sayasatdan* (Urdu) (Lahore: Qaumi Publishers, 1994), p.22.

Sindh, reacted abruptly to an article on corruption in *Herald* about the MQM (A)'s Sindh Minister, Baber Iqbal. Ishtiaq Azhar of the Mohajir Rabita Council himself threatened that 'journalists' excesses are committed through their pens, while the public has other means at its disposal'. When the *Jang* published a story on the speech of Altaf Hussain who then happened to be at the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital in Karachi, some section of the story were picked up the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The MQM (A) elucidated that its chief has been misquoted in the papers. On the very same day the BBC correspondent and *Herald* staffer was assaulted at his place by unknown assailants.³² A number of newspapers alleged MQM (A) for this molest. The MQM (A) proclaimed a war against the publication of the *Dawn* Group and announced a boycott of the *Dawn*, *Herald*, *The Star*, and *Takbeer*. In the course of discord, the armed militants patrolled on the streets and got control of the entire thoroughfare in Karachi.³³ The hawkers were also assailed by unknown gun men.

The content of the television and radio broadcasts were under strict control of the government.³⁴ The silence of the federal government on petrifying and battering of the press was undemocratic in view of the fact that free press was one of the ideals of the democracy.³⁵ The federal government fashioned a seminar entitled 'The Role of Mass Media in the Democratic Pakistan' and journalists from whole of the country were invited. Nawaz castigated the journalists for their irresponsible behavior. He said, 'You should not criticize us when we are on the right course'.³⁶ The purpose of the seminar was to bridge the differences between the political parties and the print media, but the speech of the premier did not let that to happen.

Herald tried out to get the version of the MQM (A) side over the whole episodes that came about in March and got in contact with the MQM (A) chairman, Azim Tariq but he declined.³⁷ The MQM (A) got hold of vast gains out of the crisis. The owners of the newspapers concurred with the organization to print their press releases and

³² *Herald*, Karachi, April 1991, p.25.

³³ Idrees Bakhtiar, 'The Press under Fire', *Herald*, April 1991, Karachi, pp.22-4.

³⁴ Javed Jabbar, and Qazi Faez Isa, *op.cit.*, p.122.

³⁵ Sherry Rehman, 'Meanwhile, Back in Islamabad', *Herald*, Karachi, April 1991, p.30.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.30-31.

³⁷ *Herald*, April 1991, p.34.

photographs.³⁸ The capitulation of freedom by the press was in actual fact a compromise over the freedom of reporting.

At whatever time media endeavored to underscore the truth of the opposition, the government esteemed its performance but when it underlined the facts related to negative performance of the government then it scorned on the press for doing giddy journalism. Nawaz controlled the media through political tools and illegal means such as abduction and beating of several notable journalists. His government adopted severe approach towards those journalists who were critical of its policies.³⁹ The duty of the media is to take heed that either government is performing the assign tasks or not and whether it is cheating with the nation or sincerely doing their respective responsibilities. The media is responsible to enlighten the nation about truth⁴⁰ and political parties have the right to agree or to turn down the news about them but no one has power to get in the way the of healthy journalism.

The affairs between the government and media (print) were not congenial⁴¹ Even the government indicted the editor and publisher of *The News* for sedition on a poem which publically criticized the government's incapability to sort out the cooperatives scandle in the Punjab. The government, however, had to pull out the charges against the paper owing to print media strong reaction.⁴²

The freedom of press was imperiled particularly in Sindh where the administration banned the entry of the daily *Frontier Post*. Jam Sadiq himself admonished the editor of the *Frontier Post*. Benazir described the ban on the newspaper as a direct hit on the freedom of the press. She said 'By doing so they have shown the difference between fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists'.⁴³

Media in Pakistan: 19 October 1993 – 5 November 1996

The democratic media affords the standpoints of all the political parties to the nation. The state of media in the PPP's tenure was not unlike any

³⁸ Mohammad Salahuddin's interview in *Herald*, Karachi, April 1991, pp.34-5.

³⁹ Stephen Philip Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 2005), p.150; Zaffar Abbas, 'Burning Issues', *Herald*, April 1991, p.34.

⁴⁰ Hina Jilani, *Human Rights and Democratic Development in Pakistan* (Lahore: Human Rights Comissionssion of Pakistan, 1998), p.6.

⁴¹ See Ijaz Shafi Gilani, *op.cit.*, p.10.

⁴² Rais Ahmad Khan, 'Pakistan in 1992: Waiting for Change', *Asian Survey*, 33:2, part 2 (February 1993), pp.131-32, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2645321>

⁴³ *Dawn*, 30 August 1991.

other preceding governments. The electronic media provided pro-PPP news; by and large every political event was highlighted as the accomplishment of the ruling party. The television rendered one-side of the story. The anti-opposition propaganda too prevailed and, to comprehend the genuine insight of the events, one had to listen to the foreign broadcast.⁴⁴

The journalists were victimized in the PPP's tenure. A senior journalist cum secretary general of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, Farooq Aqdas, was nabbed by the Islamabad police when he was in Rawalpindi which was in principle interference of the capital police in the Punjab territory. He was seized on the wish of another journalist who was friend of Asif Ali Zardari and had some private kind of disagreement with Aqdas.⁴⁵ When journalists boycotted the proceedings of the National Assembly to protest restriction on their movement and arrest of Aqdas, the Minister for Information, Khalid Kharal told newsmen: 'This is your sweet will and I would not force you to cover the proceedings of the house'.⁴⁶

The pronouncement of the Pakistan Television Corporation to cut down the quota allocated to the premier, chief ministers and federal ministers was hailed, in general, as it appeared that the age of controlled media was over. Benazir had directed to curtail her enormous exposure in the news to allay the concerns of those people who had to switch to foreign radios and news channels to balance the view points of the government and the opposition on the Pakistani media.⁴⁷ The substantial reporting of Benazir in news had altered the status of '*Khabarnama*' to '*Wazir-i-Azam Nama*'.⁴⁸ The PPP frequently accentuated that it has rendered independence to the press and no press recommendation was forced on it. The government also wiped out the tax on newsprint.⁴⁹

The ruling party was, however, concerned about misreporting in the print media. Benazir averred that the media misreported the statement of Law Minister, Iqbal Haider on blasphemy.⁵⁰ She mentioned that he did not get interviewed by the Irish newspaper but the news agency

⁴⁴ Khalid Ali, 'Freedom for TV and Radio', *Dawn*, 9 April 1994.

⁴⁵ Shaheen Sehbai, 'PM's Media Disaster', *Dawn*, 27 April 1994.

⁴⁶ *Dawn*, 27 April 1994.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*; Javed Jabbar, *The Global City* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1999), p.107.

⁴⁸ Nisar Osmani, 'Khabarnama to be Khabarnama at Last?' *Dawn*, 27 April 1994.

⁴⁹ *Dawn*, 9 July 1994.

⁵⁰ See *Dawn*, 12 July 1994.

provided reasonable coverage to the absolute fake news item.⁵¹ Alike Farroq Ahmed Khan Leghari took the journalists to task over the Mehran Bank scam. He chastised Kamran Khan, the investigative journalist, for reporting that Younus was good friend of Leghari and offered him two hundred million rupees for the election campaign.⁵²

Some of the ministers were not contented with free style of reporting, therefore, advertisements were not made available to a number of national newspapers and leading dailies which did not surrender independent style of coverage.⁵³ The government bestowed enormous privileges – foreign trips, monetary and professional benefits to the clique of journalists that espoused government policies. The journalists who were critical of government policies were contemplated as foes and did not enjoy any sort of benefit from government side.⁵⁴ The independence of press is one of the prerequisites to put society in order and to propagate democratic outlook, however, the government which made tall claim of rendering freedom of press did not put it into practice. The governments had imposed restrictions on freedom of media as it wanted to hide its corruption.⁵⁵

In 1994, subsequent to pull out of army, the law and order in Karachi exacerbated and media started to report it. Benazir criticized the press for continually embroidering the facts. She was of the view that by and large the law and order situation in Karachi had improved. Benazir did not pay heed to those media persons who were monitoring the situation of Sindh on everyday basis. She barely deemed the information of Karachi based clique of confidant journalists. She termed those journalists as 'traitors' who tried to propagate the 'alarming' accounts in regard to law and order situation in Sindh.⁵⁶ Even the publications of six Karachi based evening newspapers were proscribed by the Sindh government.⁵⁷ The ruling party seemed to be at war with the media. The government did not trust the media, therefore, it kept it under strict measures. Freedom of the press remained controlled under the democratic civil government and it was massively used against political

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 13 July 1994.

⁵² Farooq Leghari interview by Zahid Hussain, *Newsline*, Karachi, June 1994, p.37.

⁵³ Safdar F.S. Lodhi, 'Let the Press Suffer No Curbs', *Dawn*, 11 September 1994.

⁵⁴ Shaheen Sehbai, 'Wither BB's Media Policy?', *Dawn*, 23 September 1994.

⁵⁵ Sardar Shaukat Ali, *Pakistan: Issues of Government and Politics* (n.p., n.d.).

⁵⁶ M.H. Askari, 'Promises and Realities', *Dawn*, 21 December 1994.

⁵⁷ *Dawn*, 1 and 5 July 1995.

opponents like particularly Nawaz Sharif.⁵⁸

The judiciary also criticised the press when it wrote about its performance. Chief Justice of the Supreme Court took notice of statements, articles in which reproofs were cited over the composition of constitutional benches, rulings of the benches, appointments of judges and professional conduct of the judges of superior courts.⁵⁹ It was due right of the press to promote the debate over the system of judiciary as it happened in other democratic societies.⁶⁰

Benazir affirmed that media in Pakistan was perfectly free and that her government was beleaguered by the media. She asserted that the government did not pressurize the media even though it was indefatigable in citing deprecating comments over the functioning of the government. She too condemned the libels in newspaper against the government.⁶¹ But when press instigated to practice its freedom by tendering the names of the politicians (extending opposition and treasury benches) who obtained loans from the banks and did not make a return then opposition joined up with the government against the press and bureaucracy. Politicians accused the press and bureaucracy for hatching a plot against them so as to describe them as corrupt. The press was unnecessarily criticized but no politician denied that loans were gained by them.⁶² Benazir maintained that democracy refers to accountability and responsibilities⁶³ but when press did accountability politicians did not put up with it. At once politicians brushed their disagreements aside for their personal gains but not at all collaborated with each other in national interest.

Media in Pakistan: 17 Feb. 1997 – 12 Oct. 1999

on 11 March 1997 the Press and Publication Ordinance was promulgated which mentioned that the government could forfeit any newspaper, book or publication if it deemed that any section of writing held phony rumor or bid to ruin the Pakistan's ties with the international world or sought to sway the army or police official to abandon his allegiance to his duties and discipline. The sentence for the offence was incarceration ranging from six months to one year and could be imposed by any magistrate. The ordinance banned that no such account of any house of the

⁵⁸ Ijaz Shafi Gilani, *op.cit.*, p.11.

⁵⁹ I.A. Rehman, 'Not by Law of Contempt Alone', *Dawn*, 25 April 1995.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 'Defining Limits & Safeguards', *Dawn*, 26 April 1995.

⁶¹ Benazir Bhutto interview by Charlie Rose, *Dawn*, 4 November 1995.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 8 November 1995.

⁶³ Benazir Bhutto interview by Charlie Rose, *op.cit.*

Parliament could be referred that was detrimental for holding of public order or contrary to morality. The ordinance barred the citation from edited proceedings of the Senate and the National Assembly as well as excerpt from proceeding of any court or tribunal which was prohibited or withheld. Interestingly neither any ministry nor official owned the responsibility of promulgation of the ordinance. The government was criticized by the PPP for the putting the ordinance into force.⁶⁴ The ordinance cropped up when the Parliament was not in session⁶⁵ and seemed that like the former governments, it too aspired to govern through ordinances, or else, then such a development was not probable without the opposition's consent. The ordinance was stern and despotic as it curbed the freedom of press which was its constitutional right.⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch report cited that notwithstanding the government's guarantee that freedom of press would be esteemed a number of journalists and newspaper offices were assailed.⁶⁷

In January 1999 the *Jang* Group published a news pertaining to decree of a court in London opposed to the kin of Nawaz Sharif. Consequently the advertisements from public and private sector was halted by the government and print quota was not provided to the *Jang* Group.⁶⁸ It was alleged that it had put up news print quota for sale in black market. The government asked it to follow four conditions: to replace its 16 senior most journalists according to the preference of the government; story (personal, business or any other affair) relating to Nawaz's family should not be published; tender support to Shariat Bill, not to pen anything opposed to it and follow the government's line on issues that were coming up.⁶⁹ As the *Jang* Group did not abide by these conditions its accounts were frozen and income tax notices were issued.⁷⁰ Senator Saif-ur-Rehman and others admonished the owner of *Jang* Group Mir Shakilur Rehman. Shakilur Rehman emanated the recordings of their conversation at a press conference.⁷¹

⁶⁴ *Dawn*, 12 March 1997.

⁶⁵ Mazdak, 'The Unwanted Baby', *Dawn*, 15 March 1997.

⁶⁶ 'All for the Best', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32:14 (April 1997), p.678, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4405243>

⁶⁷ *Dawn*, 6 January 1998.

⁶⁸ Ameen Jan, 'Pakistan on a Precipice' *Asian Survey*, 39:5 (September – October 1999), pp.701-02, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3021163>

⁶⁹ Sajjad Ali Shah, *Law Courts in a Glass House: An Autobiography* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp.601-3.

⁷⁰ Ijaz Shafi Gilani, *op.cit.*, pp.20-21.

⁷¹ Sajjad Ali Shah, *An Autobiography*, *op.cit.*, pp.601-3.

Meanwhile cases were registered against three dailies of Karachi: *Jang*, *Amn* and *Percham* on account of printing an advertisement of the subsidiary of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) entitled as 'Khidmat-e-Khalq'. Journalists wanted to have a word with the premier over the issue but he was not prepared for it. The journalists articulated that their boycott would persist till the premier did not bring to an end the intimidation of the *Jang* Group and pulled out the sedition cases in opposition to three dailies. They also refused to attend all the functions held by the Ministry of Media and Information.⁷²

The director of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) I. A. Rehman believed that the stance of the government did not seek to ruin Shakilur Rehman but to wreck freedom of speech. He elucidated that the root cause of the trouble was the approach of the government towards freedom of information.⁷³ The HRCP in its 1998 report traced the aversion of government towards the press. The report was in large part denounced by the electronic media.⁷⁴

A study on freedom of press by Freedom House, a New York based non-profit organization, covered 68 countries. It showed that in Pakistan the electronic media (radio and television) was grasped by the government which made use of it to denounce the opposition and for its own commendation. It referred to 22 cases of press freedom violation, physical assails over journalists, arrests and assassinations of journalists, suspension of eight newspapers and raids on five newspaper offices. All these events transpired just in 1998.⁷⁵ On 5 May 1999 the opposition staged a token walked out from the Senate to register a protest against the vile approach of the government towards the press.⁷⁶ The news bulletin of the Pakistan Television (PTV) was under the tight clench of Mushahid Hussain who successfully used it in the favour of Nawaz.⁷⁷

On 8 May 1999 the editor of *The Friday Times* Najam Sethi was abducted from his residence.⁷⁸ Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Yaseen Khan Watto affirmed that the Sethi was apprehended by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) whereas ISI sources declined the assertion.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp.601-3.

⁷³ I.A. Rehman, interview by Syed Ali Hasan, *Herald*, February 1999, p.43.

⁷⁴ Eqbal Ahmad, 'Democrats against Democracy', *Dawn*, 14 March 1999.

⁷⁵ *Dawn*, 3 May 1999.

⁷⁶ *Dawn*, 6 May 1999.

⁷⁷ Anjum Niaz, 'PTV 'Commissars and the First Family', *Dawn*, 6 June 1999.

Also see Anatol Lieven, 'The Pressures on Pakistan', *Foreign Affairs*, 81:1 (Jan.–Feb. 2002), pp.110-11, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20033006>

⁷⁸ *Dawn*, 9 May 1999.

The opposition collectively protested over the abduction of Sethi.⁷⁹ The Sindh Assembly condemned the government for its vindictive approach towards the journalist.⁸⁰ Sethi was released in a few days, amid other reasons international pressure too brought about his release.⁸¹ So it is obvious that media in Pakistan had to fight hard to get its freedom from governments.

On 25 May 1999, the All Party Conference (APC) convened by the Jammat-e-Islami (JI) adopted a resolution to disapprove the spiteful actions against freedom of press and journalists. It insisted on the government to waive the bar over the setting up of television and radio channels in the private sector. The APC also tendered its full support to the rights of the journalists.⁸²

Conclusion

The free press has not been endurable to the governments in Pakistan (1988-1999) at all, yet, it has remained indispensable for it enlightens the people with the political decisions that impinge on them. It is not the obligation of the press to cite the literature that could aid the government to bolster itself but, for sure, good governance is the exclusive responsibility of the government in order to keep people on its side. It is normal that every government feels like that its false moves should not be known to the people but it is prerogative of the people to be informed about all the doings as on the basis of their performance they have to make their choices in the following elections. The governments' attempts to restrict the freedom of media has been undemocratic; it is not within the jurisdiction of the government to impede the media from showing reflections of truth. The press is endowed with the responsibility to enlighten the nation about the performance of their representatives, and, in the case of misuse of power by them, media is justified in revealing the truth whether the governments like that or not.

⁷⁹ M. Ziauddin, 'Where is Najam Sethi?', *Dawn*, 11 May 1999.

⁸⁰ *Dawn*, 12 May 1999.

⁸¹ M.B. Naqvi, 'Why This Press Bashing?', *Dawn*, 18 May 1999.

⁸² *Dawn*, 26 May 1999.