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Is Pakistani state at war with free press?

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Master of Science in Journalism

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This Capstone Project feature report is submitted to the Faculty of Journalism as partial fulfillment of Master of Science in Journalism degree

by

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Introduction

Ivan Petrovich Pavlov, a Russian physiologist, is best known for his work on classical conditioning. His theory, as per various psychology text books, informs us that "behaviour is learnt by a repetitive association between the response and the stimulus". To prove his point, Pavlov experimented with a dog, where he presented a sound to act as a stimulus and later gave food to the animal. Soon after repetitive attempts, the animal began salivating whenever it heard the sound.

Psychologists around the world say there is a lesson in this experiment: it demonstrates that human behaviour, too, can be manipulated or maneuvered through conditioning.

Pakistan's media scene today depicts a similar picture where many journalists say they have been "conditioned" to self-censor news. But unlike Pavlov using a sound as a stimulus, certain "powers that be" use threat and violence to intimidate journalists and force them to behave in a certain way.

Badar Alam, editor of Herald – a monthly current affairs magazine, says censorship in Pakistani media acts in multiple ways. (Alam, 2019)

He lists them down to four types: a) direct censorship, where authorities, such as Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), issue directives forbidding coverage on certain topics; b) indirect censorship, where a mysterious web of phone calls and emails work behind the scenes to not let something go to print or air on television; c) threats or intimidation, where physical security of journalists is at risk for covering a story that may end up upsetting government officials or political parties; and, d) big money censorship, where reporters simply cannot do stories that may harm the business interests of news organizations.

Alam cites an example from his personal experience where his magazine was subjected to much flak on the internet for giving space to Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) – a protest moment which originated from the country's tribal areas demanding restoration of basic rights and protection of Pashtuns against 'state brutality', as the movement's founders put it.

"You do not see this particular movement being covered by most of the media in Pakistan and you see it only in a few newspapers such as Herald and Dawn," says Alam. It is an evidence, he adds, there is some kind of effort to not allow this movement to create headlines or become a part of the media coverage.

"So, if you do that kind of coverage, you receive indirect messages sometime, and you receive other indications that you are not really liked well by the powers that be." In reaction to the coverage, Alam says, a social media campaign is launched that "starts labelling you as anti-state, as enemy of the state, and as traitor". (Alam, 2019)

'Powers that be' is a reference many journalists use for Pakistan's army.

Shahzeb Jillani, a senior producer at Dunya News, says the reason this happens is because "on local TV, you can say whatever you want to for as long as it's directed towards politicians, but when your criticism is directed towards military, it simply cannot go on air".

It is for this reason alone, he adds, we see many journalists using words such as 'powerful institutions' and 'establishment' while referring to military. "They are simply afraid of saying the word 'military' when talking about it. And that's how we don't see coverage of topics not liked by the military," he says. (Jillani, 2019)

Jillani is a vocal critic of the country's military establishment and its political maneuvering. It is perhaps for his bluntness expressed online, mostly through his Twitter account or his YouTube channel, that he has found himself facing courts on charges of "cyber-terrorism" under the controversial the 'Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016', commonly referred to as PECA.

A First Information Report (FIR) was registered against Jillani by a complainant named Maulvi Iqbal Haider, which said that the journalist, during an episode of a popular talk-show 'Dunya Kamran Khan Kay Saath' aired on December 8, 2017, "articulated defamatory remarks against respected institutions of the country".

The complaint further read that Jillani spoke against the Pakistan's armed forces and tried to allege as if the country's military was directly involved in kidnapping of citizens – a phenomenon which is referred to as 'missing persons' in the local press. Jillani

was further accused of "toeing the line of foreign agencies on social media and had also been blogging in order to implement his agenda against the sovereignty of Pakistan". Dawn, in an editorial 'Press freedom hero' published on April 26, 2019, termed the FIR against the Dunya News senior producer as "entirely unwarranted".

Laws to silence free speech

This isn't the first time a state agency, such as the FIA, has used a law to harass a journalist for voicing an opinion.

When PECA was being drafted and debated, this was precisely the main concern for human rights activists and journalist bodies that this law would be used to "silence any criticism of the state".

Farieha Aziz, a digital right activist and director of Bolo Bhi – a rights advocacy organisation, says about the cybercrime law, or PECA, that though the government claim they introduced it for the protection of the people, but in fact, they brought it for their own protection. "Essentially I see the cybercrime law as a law to protect the state against people's criticism and that's how it has been used," she says. (Aziz, 2019)

While the law was subjected to debate, the Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) government stressed that the law was necessary to provide relief to the survivors of harassment online. They said the online space is unregulated and that the law would help in making internet safer.

But Aziz argues that the law is yet to provide any relief to any survivor of harassment. "The hate speech continues to go unchecked. The only intent behind this law is to curb speech and to criminalize and take action against people who are not toeing the line," she says.

Aziz was a part of a group that fought against the implementation of the law, but they only succeeded in pushing it back to some extent. However, the pushback didn't fully ensure the rights and freedoms of the people would be protected.

"At the time of the bill, we would say that everyone should carry pre-arrest bail application with them," she says. (Aziz, 2019)

Another state-operated department, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), has quite frequently requested Twitter to take down accounts tweeting against the state or its military establishment.

Twitter released a transparency report in 2018, and it shows that the total number of accounts reported by Pakistani authorities to the microblogging website were over 3,000 in the first six months of the year. The report said the accounts were reported for offences such as "spreading hate material" and "inciting violence".

One notable case that received much public outcry on social media was that of legal expert Reema Omer. In January this year, Omer took to Twitter to say that the company reached out to her on three of her tweets that were said to be reported in violation of the Pakistani law.

"Interesting times where 'officials' see references to the law — i.e., the Constitution + judgments of high courts — as a violation of the law," she wrote and shared screenshots of her tweets where she questioned the legality of military courts under Pakistan's constitution. (Omer, 2019)

One regulator for all media

Journalist fraternity in the country has been wary of the state trying to regulate media. They fear that under the guise of laws, the state would try to influence or censor free speech. It is for this reason that there has been a strong backlash on the proposed Pakistan Media Regulatory Authority (PMRA).

In January, the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government's federal cabinet approved the creation of PMRA that will enable the state to regulate all media in the country from one platform.

Herald's editor Alam views the proposition with suspicion. He says the Pakistani government has a very unenviable track record as far as regulating the media is concerned. In old days, he says, there was an ordinance called 'Press and Publications Ordinance' which was used at a large scale against many publications to shut them down.

Before PMRA, there was PEMRA: Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority, which came into effect in 2002. It was PEMRA's mandate to monitor and regulate electronic media. Alam says since it came into being, there have been number of

instances where the body has shut down television channels, television talk shows, and taken many punitive action including imposing fines and penalties on television stations.

"At the same time we see that there is no uniform or standardized application of these fines or regulatory mechanisms," he questions. "We see that one television may not get any punishment for doing something but another television would be punished to do the same thing. Or, for instance, one television, may be punished for covering one news but it may get away covering a similar kind of news generating from other source," he argues.

Alam cites example of different Islamist organizations that are covered in Pakistani television media and whose activities are violent and hostile towards the peace in the society. He says the television media still covers them.

"Sometimes there are preachers, religious leaders who say things that are hostile towards many communities in the country. And they sometimes openly incite violence. In many of these instances, PEMRA has taken no action, whereas we have seen that the same PEMRA has taken very stringent actions on issues much less likely to disturb social peace," he says. This compels the Herald editor to be concerned of the newly proposed PMRA. Why? He lists them to three points.

"So, number one: government's regulations have always been arbitrary. Number two: it has always been selective. Number three: it has always been without any kind of rules and regulations in the sense that one rule should apply to everyone. It's not uniform, it's not across the board," he says.

Alam says going by past instances, it is clear that any regulatory authority that comes into being in Pakistan will try to suppress free speech. "If you look at what PMRA wants to achieve, you will perhaps be even more scared of its limit," he says. (Alam, 2019)

The PEMRA only regulates television and radio. News websites are outside of its limit. Similarly, newspapers and magazines are not covered by PEMRA, and neither social media. The proposed PMRA will be regulating dotcoms, television, radio, newspaper, magazines, and social media.

"So, it must have a lot of power to do this and when any entity has any power in Pakistan, the track record of those entities has always shows that they misuse the power," says Alam.

"They impose and enforce that power arbitrarily and without any standardized rules and regulations. That's the biggest fear people have that it will become another tool for censorship and another tool for suppression of freedom of information."

Aziz, on the other hand, has other concerns. "There is a licensing scheme that is worrying," she says. "It is where you have to obtain prior licenses to whether you want to run a paper, or you want to run a website and you have to renew those licenses apparently every year subject to discretion or whatever procedure."

If they let's say don't like your content or slant whatever, Aziz adds, they can refuse a license. "That essentially means you are not able to put out your view or whatever it is you want to publish."

Aziz says social media was at least a departure from state control and even editorial control. After PMRA, it would not be such a case. "I think a consolidated media regulatory authority is just a mechanism of control," she says. (Aziz, 2019)

Dunya TV's' senior producer, Jillani, too views the introduction of PMRA with much suspicion. He has reasons to be so as he has himself been on the receiving end of another such law.

He says though on paper there is no harm in it as there shouldn't be parallel bodies regulating different forms of media, the government's intention, however, is to get a grip on the media in totality. There are countries such as China, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt where social media is regulated strictly.

"My colleagues in journalism, who have seen the days of martial law, indirect censorship, and who have suffered at the hands of militias operated by political parties in a city like Karachi are wary of the proposed PMRA," he says.

"Many journalists don't think this initiative is going to serve the interests of democracy, freedom of expression, or independent journalism for that matter.

"There is a sinister intention behind proposing this body. And I think we have enough evidence to believe so as our rulers don't have any strong democratic credentials to speak of, and neither did they struggle for democracy," he says.

Jillani said the PTI was served the government in a plate so naturally, the party will listen to those "powers who wish to suppress everything from public knowledge and those who propagate a false narrative to mislead people". (Jillani, 2019)

Legal perspective

If the state is trying to enforce laws that curb free speech, then does such lawmaking not stand in clear violation of freedoms as enshrined in the country's constitution under Article 19? Or the restrictions under the article kills the very idea of free speech?

Article 19 states: "Every citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression, and there shall be freedom of the press, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam or the integrity, security or defense of Pakistan or any part thereof, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, commission of or incitement to an offence."

Waqqas Mir, a barrister and a partner at Axis Law Chambers – a legal consultancy firm, thinks how a constitutional provision is framed is not the final word on how it is implemented or interpreted.

"Supreme Court of Pakistan case-law is very clear that wherever 'fundamental rights' are 'subject to reasonable restrictions', this cannot mean that the state can give rights with one hand and take them away with the other," he says.

Mir says a lot depends on the culture of free speech and how courts protect it. He doesn't think the text of Article 19 kills the idea of free speech but "would like to see the heads of restrictions to be limited".

However, the barrister is critical of the media laws in the country and says each of these laws has certain provisions that have been used by political as well as military governments to stifle dissent. According to Mir, there are provisions in these laws, such as PECA or PEMRA, that are over-broad and should be re-drafted or amended in order to ensure that they are not abused. Alternatively, he says, courts should interpret them in ways that "facilitate, and not restrict, freedom of speech".

A general impression among the critics of media regulation is that the state enacts laws to save the country's political class from criticism. Mir says he personally think all

governments, wherever they may be in the world, act out of self-interest and want to be "shielded from criticism that make them look bad".

"It is up to an independent judiciary, free press, and the opposition to ensure that checks are imposed upon those in power," he says. But he is quick to add that many of these laws also serve a useful function.

"They preserve the state's ability to intervene when public order is seriously threatened or where there is immediate danger of imminent violence as result of incitement. However, they have not always been implemented in a transparent manner and that makes Pakistan's free speech record far from flattering," he says.

With the advent and unchecked expansion of social media, multiple states are trying to cope with fast paced technological change. Such as there are talks of PMRA circling in the corridors of power, other states, too, are trying to find ways to regulate the uncharted waters of the internet.

With the technology available, different states are trying different—from shutting down platforms to introducing greater regulation. Australia, for instance, wants WhatsApp to share conversations where demanded by the state. Singapore wants to regulate social in the interest of dealing with 'fake news'.

Similarly, Mir says, Pakistan wants to control social as well as other kinds of media to address its own challenges.

"My personal view is that allowing a free exchange of ideas and amplifying voices that counter hate speech and fake speech is the best safeguard—instead of arrogating to one's self the power to decide what can or cannot be published," he says.

"This is not to suggest that states do not have a powerful argument for controlling what is said; states all over the world regulate what is said and published—copyright law, laws against defamation and laws relating to fair marketing are only some of examples. However, the category of restricted speech should be narrow and not ever broadening."

Mir says history provides ample evidence that when states try to suppress exchange of ideas and opinions they almost do more harm than good. But he thinks there are aspects of the media that all state regulates; this, he says, includes laws against defamation,

incitement to violence, pornography, defamation of religion or blasphemy, copyrights violations, and deceptive marketing among other things.

"Apart from these clearly identified categories I think states should be extremely circumspect about extending their reach to block or ban content or restrict speech. Allowing diverse perspectives to flourish will usually balance what is called the marketplace of ideas," he says.

He says regulation need not always mean criminal charges or jail time. "The threat of civil penalties and an effective forum for dispute resolution can prevent adopt over-broad measures aimed at restricting speech."

Is censorship a recent phenomenon?

A look back at Pakistani state's relationship with its press show that over the years, different governments used different means, at times legal and at times illegal, to suppress free speech.

Zamir Niazi, a renowned journalist and author, maintained a record of oppression suffered by the press at the hands of Pakistani state. Niazi, born in Mumbai in 1932, observed Pakistani state's dealings with its press from close quarters.

In his book, 'The Press in Chains', Niazi describes the relationship between the press and the state in following words: "Press and persecution in this part of the world were born together, with few intervals of freedom depending upon the circumstances. The very idea of newspapers was behind the bars." (Niazi, 2010)

Professor Sharif al Mujahid, a historian and a researcher, reminisced about the early years of journalism in a new-born Pakistan in an article published in Dawn's InPaper Magazine on August 20, 2011.

History or historical evidences are often subject to debate, depending on new credible sources of information becoming available.

Professor Mujahid's thoughts in the article titled "Stop Press" brings to light perhaps the first instance where a news publication was penalized for writing something the state did not like. Even more surprising were the names of the people who called for action against that publication.

During the 1950s, as Professor Mujahid notes, the press was comparatively free due to lack of legislation. He denounces that there was any "repression or victimisation" of the press. But it was not to be for too long. (Mujahid, 2011)

The Civil and Military Gazette, an Anglo-Indian newspaper founded in 1872 in British India, ran a story in 1949 suggesting to partition Kashmir to resolve the crisis. During that time, The Civil and Military Gazette was published from Lahore, Simla, and Karachi. The report was not received well by much of the other Pakistani press that existed, including Dawn and The Pakistan Times.

In response, The Pakistan Times' editor Faiz Ahmed Faiz joined hands with Dawn's editor Altaf Hussain and brought together nine more editors to write a joint front-page editorial condemning The Civil and Military Gazette.

This was the first instance when Pakistani state stepped in and penalised The Civil and Military Gazette by suspending its printing. Though the suspension was later lifted, the Gazette became the first publication to have suffered consequences for having a different opinion.

Ironically, Faiz, a renowned poet who raised his voice for the poor and against the oppression throughout his life, became party in taking away somebody else's right to free speech. Soon after, the state began acting against publications having communist or socialist leanings. Faiz, too, found himself in prison after having been accused of involvement in a conspiracy case in Rawalpindi.

Shahida Kazi, born in September 1944, joined Dawn as a reporter in the 1960s when Ayub's regime was at its peak. Kazi has lived through Ayub's martial law, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's democracy, then Ziaul Haq years, and later saw the folding and unfolding of democracy in the country under Benazir Bhutto, then Nawaz Sharif, and again Benazir, then Nawaz, until finally Pervez Musharraf pulled the plugs.

She says Ayub's regime was comparatively fearful than others. "Of course, the editors were given instructions to what to do, to what to give, and what not to give. But, it wasn't as bad as it became later. In democratic periods, it became much worse," says Kazi.

Kazi recalls when the army action began in the East Pakistan in 1971, the country's media was not allowed to report on anything that was happening there. "The people were

kept ignorant. And people were happy with it because of the prejudice against Bengalis during that time," she says.

When the army action was in full swing in East Pakistan, Kazi was working with a television agency, Asian Television Agency. It provided films to all televisions. During that time, TV was not aired simultaneously, meaning Karachi's transmission was limited to Karachi, Lahore's transmission was limited to Lahore, and Islamabad's transmission was limited to Islamabad. The footage normally aired with a delay of one at least since filmmaking was a tedious task.

Kazi says people only had the option of relying on Pakistan Television (PTV), Radio Pakistan, and local newspapers to consume news.

"The local newspapers that seemed suitable to government were known. PTV was the mouth piece of the government and so was the radio. BBC was banned. It was illegal to listen to BBC. The foreign newspapers were banned so people had no clue about the happenings. Action was taken against BBC listeners if learnt. So, it was all hidden," she says.

Kazi's Asian Television Agency had their reporters and camerapersons in Bengal. "I saw the start of what we call embedded journalism today," she says. Asian Television Agency's team would accompany Pakistani army and were taken to different areas to record footage.

"I don't know how ashamed I should be, I used to write reports of it. Obviously, what was not the truth and I knew that what I was writing was a lie," says Kazi.

"For example, a lot of people at that time were going and everyone knew that they were going to India as refugees. We used to show the film in which people carrying items were moving and say that the people who had gone to India are returning. And that the situation has gotten so better that these people are returning. There is no way of knowing that whether they were going to India or returning to Pakistan."

Kazi says she remembers very well that their agency showed a film of a cinema where there was a long queue of people. "I don't know whether I should be proud of it or not, I wrote the commentary that the situation has normalized to the extent that the cinemas are running. And so many people are standing outside the cinema for purchasing tickets,"

she says, adding while the truth was that those people were forced by the army to stand outside the cinema.

She says the war coverage throughout the 17 days centered on how well the Pakistani forces are faring in front of the enemy India. “It continued, ultimately only fine day, a news from the government came that there has been an agreement, and according to the agreement, fighting has stopped in East Pakistan,” she says.

“That was it. Yahya Khan was the president. He appeared on TV and said that yes, the war has ended but we will continue in the West Pakistan. And we will show India, do this and that. Our people were glad that we won.”

It was the next say, Kazi recalls, people heard from foreign channels, or somewhere else that Pakistan has surrendered. “Our media never said that we have surrendered.”

Kazi says when Bhutto came to power, journalists were happy. But their happiness was short lives, she says. “Bhutto’s personal likes and dislikes mattered greatly. Media was supposed to be open and free officially, but it wasn’t at all.” (Kazi, 2019)

Then came Zia. It is one of those eras in Pakistan’s history which journalists can hardly forget. It was the time when newspapers had to go through a military appointee before going in print. Newspapers were told about what stories to take and what to not.

When newspapers, as a show of protest, decided to leave blank spaces on stories censored by the dictatorial regime, the state took notice of it and banned the practice.

Modern-day censorship

In this age, when it is relatively difficult to impose a direct of censorship. The Pakistani state is accused by journalists of using measures such as withdrawing government advertisements or create an environment of fear to put pressure on news organizations.

As a result, journalists have resorted to self-censor their news. Jillani agrees that more than state-imposed censorship, there is self-censorship which, he says, is a very sophisticated tool to control news media in Pakistan.

“In the last one and a half year, the pattern has changed. Now, nobody needs to kidnap, threaten or beat journalists up,” he says.

"Today, big media houses are already in their control after they were targeted through various means, such as putting their channel off cables, forcefully halting their circulation, and taking off their advertisements."

Jillani says when big media houses were seen crunching financially, other small setups found it wise to toe the line as dictated. As a result, the culture of self-censorship evolved and media houses decided to avoid stories which "powerful institutions" in the country found problematic. Many journalists and anchors who weren't liked much by certain quarters were taken off air, he adds. (Jillani, 2019)

In a democratic setup, news media is supposed to act and work freely, and no political party or state institution can interfere in editorial freedom of a media outlet. Jillani says let's keep aside what happens on TV, media owners have now begun to ask journalists to delete critical tweets or posts from their social media accounts.

"If those journalists will argue that they are stating facts and posting them on their personal accounts, their organizations in return would insist them to still delete it saying they are under pressure. It has happened with me," he says.

"Taking a story or not in a newspaper or on a TV show is an editorial decision. But if you are being monitored on what you post on social media, the people you meet or the book you are reading, then this has gone a step ahead of martial law."

Jillani says the reason some institutions of the government are so much worried with what they call "fifth generation warfare" is because they want to control the narrative. They want themselves to be the ones controlling the talk, he adds.

The social media is a different territory where it is practically not possible for any entity to be in control of what the users will post or talk about. Therefore, the platform became the go-to place for many journalists who were taken off air, such as Talat Hussain of Geo News, for being too critical of the country's military establishment.

On social media, Hussain has his own YouTube channel where he keeps on posting commentary on political happening in the country which is consumed by hundreds of thousands of viewers on a daily basis.

So far, the 'powers that be' have let it happen. If there really was a threat to journalists to not voice an independent opinion, then how criticism of the state is being allowed to air on YouTube without any pressure.

Jillani thinks this may be because they are tolerating their voices for the time being, "but who knows they might run of patience soon".

"Our leaders today don't look for inspiration at western democracies but import ideas from nation states where there is very little to no room of freedom of expression," he says.

"Till social media is open for all, people would continue to say what they feel like. If they will regulate it or close it down, people would find other avenues to get their point across.

They cannot suppress free speech as it is a fundamental right guaranteed in the constitution."

Ramsha Jahangir, a reporter with Dawn, agrees to Jillani's viewpoint but says the Pakistani state isn't at war with free press. "I feel is there are certain narratives, more favorable and less critical, that the state feels should be highlighted," she says.

Jahangir does admit that there is an environment of fear and threat that has resulted media practicing self-censorship. "It is rather a war of narratives which has allowed the state to crackdown on voices of dissent, voices that are critical of the government and the state institutions that don't fit with their narrative," she says.

She says it is also the reason the Pakistani government is sending more content removal requests to social media companies and talking about regulating online spaces so that "those voices, which are critical of it, are drowned and those voices, which are in favor of it, are amplified".

Jahangir acknowledges self-censoring her reportage pertaining to military, activity of military, and information warfare.

"It is the environment and the climate at the moment where my organization is going through a crunch and are constantly being targeted by the establishment for toeing a narrative that was critical of them," she says. "So, that's why I did not want to be a cause of the problem, or contributing to a similar perception."

Jahangir has kept a track of the government's clampdown on social media through various news reports and continue to do so. She says the online space is shrinking and this is not just for journalists or political activists, but for almost everybody.

"The red lines are blurred now; you don't know what you say online can get you in trouble. The reality is, anything online is accessible at any point so there is an environment of threat, there is a lot of self-censorship, there is also a lot of fear that you are being very, very critical and calculative of what you post and share online," she says. (Jahangir, 2019)

However, foreign journalists aren't particularly concerned about censorship or self-censorship. Declan Walsh, former Pakistan bureau chief of The New York Times, says the Pakistani state or any other institution never tried to censor their work.

"The government certainly exerted pressure on us, lots of people try to put pressure on us," he says.

"After I put a story about Musharraf in the Guardian, he threatened to sue me or sued me, I don't remember. Then I put out a story about the MQM, and they threatened to sue me.

We wrote the story about Axact, and they are suing me. So people certainly tried to put pressure through the legal system."

Walsh says the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) or the army controls the access to parts of the country, tribal belt and most of the Balochistan included, and at one point somebody tried to block his residency and visa five months before he had to leave.

"So there were many efforts to pressurise us but to be fair there was never a time when the Pakistani government actively tried to censor our news or intervene to stop me from writing a particular thing," he says.

He quickly adds, "To be fair, I'd say that the red lines for Pakistani journalists were different from red lines for foreign journalists. When I lived in Pakistan, it was clear to me that there were stories that I could write but Pakistani press was afraid to write."

But, he says, what frequently happened was that we would write a story in a particular way, and then Pakistani press would take it as a license and write about it.

"I certainly felt that there were certain censored subjects where foreign press helped the local press in discussing them which they couldn't do it on their own. So that was certainly one way in which foreign press and the local press were a little bit complimentary."

Walsh thinks the ISPR is much active in managing the news now than in the past. He says when he was serving as The Times' Pakistan bureau chief, the ISPR mostly acted as a gatekeeper, either they allowed a visit to the tribal area or not, either allowed an interview of Musharraf or not, either responded to some story published or they didn't.

"But in the age of social media, the ISPR has certainly realized the importance of getting its message out there and controlling its message and the local media much more aggressively. The army has realized that the battleground is in media as much as it is on the ground." he says.

He says they've effectively won against the Taliban in the large part of the tribal belt, containing the situation if not control it. The other biggest danger to their authority [is the media], as in many countries around the world, he adds.

"It seems that they've done very successfully, overtly through social media, covertly through pressurizing the media houses like Jang, and certainly through friendly media houses like Bol."

According to Walsh, there are much more creative ways, like sponsored production of glossy and high budget movies like Waar.

"For years, we'd been watching these Bollywood movies that cast the ISI as the bad guy, and certainly, the ISPR realized that they could have movies in which they could cast Indians as the bad guy. Credit is due for them for being this creative," he says. (Walsh, 2019)

Video Script

A news-style package on censorship in Pakistani media.

INTRO

In Pakistan, many working journalists complain they are forced to censor their work

They say they cannot report objectively on issues concerning the country's military

But Pakistan last had a military dictator 12 years ago

So, how does this censorship manifest itself under a democratic setup?

SOT – BADAR ALAM

"You receive a phone call, or you receive an email, or your company's bosses tell you that this is something that we should avoid covering, or if you have put it in your newspaper, your news magazine, or your television, you are told to remove that. That generally happens indirectly. There are no directives or orders involved in it. There is a web of phone calls or emails that work behind the scenes and make that happen"

TEXT

Journalists say they are free to criticize as long as their criticism is directed towards politicians

SOT – SHAHZEB JILLANI

"The thing with our media is: you can say whatever you want to for as long as it's directed towards politicians, but when your criticism is directed towards military, it simply cannot go on air. It is for this reason alone that we see many journalists using words such as 'powerful institutions' and 'establishment' while referring to military. They are simply afraid of saying the word 'military' when talking about it"

TEXT

Pakistan's largest English-language daily Dawn say they are getting the rough end of the stick for not toeing a particular line

They say their circulation is being forcefully disturbed in certain military cantonment areas, hurting the paper financially

Some observers point out that if Dawn is being targeted illegally, why doesn't it register a complaint with relevant authorities?

SOT – RAMSHA JAHANGIR

"It's pointless to file a complaint against someone. Who will they go to if the state is the one cracking down on their circulation and limiting their reach? You cannot go and complaint to the government about the government that this is what you are doing wrong. This is the problem: when the state takes control, who do you go to?"

TEXT

Unlike Pakistani reporters, international journalists say their concern isn't censorship but access to areas

Though they do acknowledge that red lines for Pakistani journalists are different from foreign journalists

SOT – DECLAN WALSH

"The ISPR and the army control the access to parts of the country, tribal belt and most of the Baluchistan included, and at one point somebody tried to block my residency and visa five months before I had to leave. So there were many efforts to pressurize us but to be fair there was never a time when the Pakistani government actively tried to censor the news or intervene to stop me from writing a particular thing"

TEXT

However, not all journalists think Pakistani media is forced to censor its reportage

They claim the country's media is much freer than other countries in the region

SOT – AMIR ZIA

"Pakistani journalism is definitely facing challenges. Those are subjective and objective in nature. They need to be resolved, which will take time. We need to draw comparisons with the past and the situation of the press in the region. If we look at the sub-continent, where in the west is Afghanistan and Iran and we are freer than them; in the north we have China and we fare better than them; India is in the east and their media project one-sided narrative, suppressing the voices of dissent. So, in the sub-continent, I would say Pakistan's media is much freer"

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