



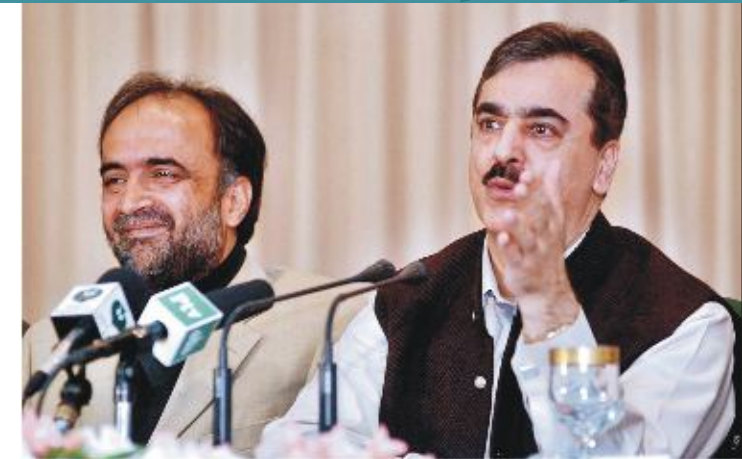
## Towards Media Democracy

“The press and electronic media will be allowed its independence. Access to information will become law after parliamentary debate and public scrutiny.”

Article 14, Charter of Democracy

The People's Government recognizes that a free and vibrant press is the greatest guarantor against tyranny and oppression.<sup>1</sup> In accordance with this principle, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's first democratic government liberated the press in 1988 by allowing free import of newsprint; abolishing government permission to establish newspapers and journals; and introducing private radio and television stations.<sup>2</sup> To safeguard the rights of working journalists, the concept of 'wage award' was introduced by the democratic government of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1973.

Under authoritarian regimes, democratic forces and media have always remained reinforcing partners in the struggle for democracy. With the restoration of democracy, this partnership continues and flourishes, as media is the fourth pillar of a democratic State. Addressing the All Pakistan Newspaper Society (APNS), President Asif Ali Zardari appreciated the vital



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role of media in establishing democracy in the country, adding that a responsible and informed media would help strengthening democracy by identifying gaps in governance and suggestions for improvement.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Pakistan Peoples Party Manifesto 2008, p.13-14

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>The News International, March 10, 2010.

Beginning with abolishing the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) 'black laws' introduced by the last authoritarian regime in November 2007, the People's Government has encouraged the democratic dissent of media, despite some ethical casualties. Instead of going for any 'content policing', the Government has mobilized the media to introduce a voluntary Code of Conduct, and encouraged self-regulation by the media industry, working journalists and media organizations.

contours of the People's Government's media policy:

*"We are confronted with a war of ideas — tolerance vs. extremism, democracy vs. authoritarianism, rule of law vs. anarchy, heterogeneity vs. homogeneity and exclusivity vs. multiplicity. In this war, Pakistan's vulnerable population segments are exposed to the message of terrorists, becoming fodder for their sinister recruiting techniques."*



President Asif Ali Zardari addressing the APNS gathered at the Presidency on March 10, 2010.

Resultantly, there is a growing realization among the media community to develop some mechanism of internal accountability to remain objective, balanced and non-partisan in editorial policies. It is believed now that the viability of democratic political system lies in a democratic media, which gives multiple perspectives and interpretations to multiple issues representing a diversity of public opinion.<sup>4</sup>

Elaborating the current context, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Qamar Zaman Kaira, has outlined the

*"Pakistan is now a functioning democracy confronted by the vestiges of information warfare, which indoctrinated our youth who have become today's suicide bombers, whereas, our goal is to put information to the service of people's empowerment, welfare, and prosperity."*<sup>5</sup>

### A Media Policy for the People

The People's Government's media policy is founded on the fundamental rights enshrined in Article 9 and Article 19 of the Constitution of

<sup>4</sup>Interview with Mazhar Arif, Executive Director, Society for Alternative Media, March 18, 2010.  
<sup>5</sup>Qamar Zaman Kaira, "From information 'warfare' to 'welfare'", *Daily Times*, January 1, 2010.

Pakistan. Article 9 of the Constitution states that "no person shall be deprived of life or liberty, save in accordance with the law."<sup>6</sup> It further states that "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."<sup>7</sup>

The above constitutional clause emphasizes the need for responsible freedom within the parameters of statehood, pre-empting any anarchist tendencies in the name of freedom of press. On the basis of these principles of our law, the People's Government has set for itself a definitive policy framework, which it has been implementing since coming to power in 2008. The cornerstones of the People's Government's media policy are:

## Resolve towards Freedom of Information

Freedom of information is a constitutional right of the people and they should have knowledge about all important issues, including those related to economy and defense. Classification of a document and its implications should be available to the people so that they may know when a decision was taken. The People's Government has been making efforts to facilitate free flow of information to the people. In this regard -- and in accordance with the Charter of Democracy and the Pakistan Peoples Party election manifesto 2008 -- and important constitutional amendment recommended by the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reforms, and subsequently passed by the National Assembly on April 8, 2010 is insertion of Article 19A. Right to Information, which states that: "Every citizen shall have the right to have access to information in all matters of public importance subject to regulation and reasonable restrictions imposed by law."

*"Madam Speaker, Members of the Parliament, media has come a long way from the first day the PPP Government opened airwaves to private networks. Our Government lost no time to the dismantle the infrastructure of violence that the last regime left behind replacing the PEMRA and print media ordinance, which hung over the media's head like a sword. We will soon be bringing other fundamental laws such as the Freedom of Information bill, and work with the stakeholders towards an open atmosphere of self-regulation with no interference from the State. I have requested the Government of day to look into providing wage support housing colonies in every province at low-cost basis for journalists."*

President Asif Ali Zardari's address to the Joint Sitting of the Parliament, September 20, 2008.

*"We understand that a democratic system is based on individual's liberty. Freedom of press ensures individual's liberty. After due deliberation, we shall do away with all the laws which negate freedom of the media. We shall legislate on freedom of information which could in real essence provide such information to the masses which would put an end to corruption and malpractices through public pressure. The existing law is defective one, and therefore merits far-reaching changes and modifications. We have available with us a blue print of Freedom of Information law and we shall implement it. We shall provide respect and service-based security to media workers and journalists. We will do our maximum to implement Wage Board Award. We shall improve the working conditions and existing legal framework focusing the remuneration of working journalists. We shall change PEMRA laws and this institution shall be made an attached body of Ministry of Information which shall ensure provision of improved facilities and environment to the electronic media."*

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani's first speech in the Parliament, March 29, 2008

*"It's true that we are late as far as the introduction of the Act for Freedom of Expression is concerned, but the delay is not intentional. We are late because the prevailing situation in the country did not allow us to proceed."*

Senator Raza Rabbani, Chairman Parliamentary Committee for Constitutional Reforms, at a seminar on ensuring good governance in Islamabad, August 19, 2009.

*"We must first come up with alternative idioms and mediums. A new paradigm should be based on ideas of access to information, ideological argumentation, policy articulation, public diplomacy, and strategic communications. If we want our outreach and engagement to be seen credible and to be accepted, we must start from a point of creative engagement in which truth and objectivity are placed at the centre...Pakistan's Democratic Government is committed to promote freedom of expression and access to information in the greater public interest. But democracy, like communication, is a two-way street. To deliver on its promise, the democratic government needs the support of an informed citizenry that can not only identify problems but can also offer solutions for good governance. Our efforts must become collaborative."*

Qamar Zaman Kaira, Federal Minister for Information & Broadcasting, at the National Defense University, Islamabad, January 1, 2010.

<sup>6</sup>Constitution of Pakistan, 1973.  
<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

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- To promote responsible freedom of the media;
- To promote growth, development and facilitation of the media;
- To promote access to information for every citizen of Pakistan;
- To create understanding about issues confronting Pakistan in the region and to provide enabling atmosphere to conduct political, economic and strategic diplomacy for promoting the national interests of the country;
- To bridge the perception gap between the people of Pakistan and its elected representatives;
- To promote cohesion among the functionaries of various Government institutions to provide quality policy input to conduct Statecraft;
- To promote inter-provincial harmony amongst the federating units giving hope and confidence to the people;
- To promote Pakistan's political and public diplomacy abroad;
- To provide support to our diplomatic moorings to promote Pakistan as a peaceful responsible and tolerant country desiring peace in the region and the world;
- To fight terrorism in all its forms and manifestations;
- To encourage national conversation and social dialogue with all stakeholders on the promotion of peace and pluralism in Pakistan;
- To promote inter-faith harmony and religious tolerance in the democratic polity;
- To provide diplomatic support to the people of Kashmir for their right of self-determination enshrined in the U.N. Security Council resolutions;
- To seek cooperation of international media in our efforts to promote Pakistan's democratic institutions to play a role in the promotion of

economic, social and political values across the social landscape of the country; and

- To provide public policy support to defeat poverty and raise the standards of living of the people of Pakistan.

### Partnering with the Media, Engaging the People



In the true spirit of partnership with the media and public diplomacy and engagement, the People's Government has undertaken several initiatives in the last two years, some of the most important of which include:<sup>8</sup>

- Promotion of the concept of self-regulation for media, through a voluntary code of conduct;
- Projection of Pakistan's efforts in the fight against terror;
- Amendments in media laws to promote vibrant broadcast and print media;

<sup>8</sup>See Section 3: Public Diplomacy, Access to Information, and Media Freedom, pp. 239-241.

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- Initiation of the legislative bill to repeal and substitute Freedom of Information Ordinance, 2002;
- Constitution of Tripartite Commission to resolve 7th Wage Board Award issues;
- Regular interaction with media representative bodies APNS, Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors, Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, APNEC and Pakistan Broadcasters Association to create a better interface for strengthening democracy and reinforcing war against terror;
- Creation of fund for financial assistance to the families of journalists martyred in the line of duty;
- Payment of long outstanding Government sector advertisement dues to newspapers;
- Promotion of public interest projects initiated by other Ministries and Government departments
- Development of public awareness and advocacy campaigns on important national issues;
- Increased national cohesion through an effective public diplomacy focusing on Benazir Income Support Program, Benazir Employees Stock Option Scheme, Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance, NFC Award 2009, Operations Rah-e-Rast and Rah-e-Nijat, IDPs' rehabilitation etc;
- Initiated and promoted public interest stakeholders' dialogue on electronic and print media;
- Development of mechanism to engage national level political leadership in dialogue through Provincial Information Ministers' Conferences, as well as through background briefings and presentations;
- Declaration of 2010 as "Year for the

Revival of Radio". As part of this initiative, the Prime Minister has started a monthly radio address to the nation on Radio Pakistan, whereas the Federal Minister of Information and Broadcasting interacts with radio listeners on a weekly basis.

### Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Media University Project

The People's Government has initiated the Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Media University Project with an aim to establish a state-of-the-art media university in Islamabad. A degree-awarding university focusing on media studies, mass



Federal Information Minister, Qamar Zaman Kaira, addressing the conclusion of a training workshop for journalists held under the SMBB Media University Project.

communication and training of media professionals would be established in Islamabad. The proposed University would be mandated to cater for the academic, professional, skill and technical needs of the fast growing media industry of Pakistan.

The proposed University would be

developed as a Centre of Excellence in the respective disciplines by complying with the Higher Education Commission requirements and the international academic standards; and by forging a private-public partnership. Apart from imparting hands-on training to media students, managers and professionals, the University would also include the issues of media governance, media regulations and media democracy in South Asian countries.

While planning for the Media University is in the formative phase, it has already organized an eight-day short course on "Media and Communications" for district correspondents in January 2010 at the Information Services Academy, Islamabad. Thirty-two correspondents participated in the course representing 25 districts of seven regions: Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan, FATA and AJK.

In March, a three-day training course on "Strategic Communications, Public and Cultural Diplomacy" was also organized by the project for nearly 60 Government officials of strategic Ministries, Departments and Agencies, in collaboration with the U.K. Government.

### Creating a new Social Discourse

The People's Government is following a multi-pronged policy of engagement and partnership with the media, the civil society and the Pakistani people through all forms of contemporary media and communication technologies. At the heart of this endeavor, however, is the core objective of creation and dissemination of a message of democracy, peace, pluralism and economic opportunity. Taking advantage of Pakistan's media and information revolution, the People's

Government is setting the contours of a constructive new social discourse that will purge the vestiges of authoritarianism and extremism, heal the nation's wounds, and give the people hope, courage and resolve to move forward with confidence in a democratic dispensation. Like Pakistan's democracy moving towards maturity, Pakistan's mushrooming media is also journeying towards maturity. A partnership of the two will create an articulate Pakistan that knows where it belongs and where it is headed:



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*"[During Operation Rah-e-Rast] We endeavored to be creative, innovative and credible to win the battle for hearts and minds and, more importantly, to reverse the ideology of death with the ideology of life and liberty.*

*"What should be our way forward? A shift from indoctrination to enlightenment through a*

*Government-media partnership. Theorists have agreed upon the point that indoctrination limits the human mind and imagination, while enlightenment liberates human thinking. The Democratic Government believes in creating an atmosphere of opportunities for enlightenment, rather than getting trapped in the mess of indoctrination and counter-indoctrination.*

*"We believe that the cancerous disconnect of social enlightenment needs to be plugged urgently. In this struggle, the Government and media have a very important role to play as partners."<sup>9</sup>*

<sup>9</sup>Qamar Zaman Kaira, "From information 'warfare' to 'welfare'", *Daily Times*, January 1, 2010.