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Paper No. 9
STATE OF MEDIA ETHICS IN PAKISTAN

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IN PAKISTAN

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INTRODUCTION

The exercise of freedom carries with it duties and responsibilities. The one provides the condition for the exercise of the other. Take one away and the other automatically falls to the ground. Thus freedom and official dictate, responsibility and compulsion cannot sit together. Freedom of expression and censorship, code of ethics and statutory directives regarding the permissible and prohibited, cannot co-exist. If compelled to live together, there will be an uneasy relationship, one that may deteriorate into mutual suspicion, bitterness and acrimony.

The media in Pakistan has always functioned under strict laws imposed by the government. These laws which carry stringent punishments against violations make it clear what is permissible and what is not. With the passage of time these laws have become ever more draconian as successive governments tried to discipline what they perceived as the "ever increasing waywardness" of the Press. The media naturally resented these laws and has kept up an unrelenting struggle against them all these years. And it was too preoccupied with this fight for self-preservation to think of self-regulation.

This has created a paradoxical situation. Because on the one hand every media practitioner in the country, by and large, felt professionally obliged to function within a self-imposed code, which more or less conformed to the media code of ethics as understood and recognized universally. On the other, these very professionals were seen opposing such a code imposed by successive governments as part of laws enacted to curb the very freedom of the Press.

However, at the shop level media practitioners in Pakistan have always tried to work within the bonds of an unwritten but universally recognized code of ethics: accuracy in reporting; protection of individual privacy; sensitivity in reporting of cases involving grief and shock; preserving the anonymity of certain vulnerable entities such as children, rape victims, innocent relatives of criminals, etc; avoidance of intimidation or persistence pursuit in the quest to obtain information; responsible use of technology in gathering of information etc.

This code was never adopted formally by the media and nor did it have any official sanction at any time other than the do's and don'ts that went with the anti-Press laws imposed from time to time by successive governments.

There is, however, one instance in the past when the Council of Pakistan Newspapers Editors (CPNE) and the government signed an accord which made it obligatory for the Press to abide by an agreed code of ethics. The accord was signed on March 6, 1980(Annex I).

The Press refused to abide by this code of ethics for more than one reason, the foremost being the fact that it was introduced at a time when the print media in Pakistan was undergoing one of its worse phases of government imposed censors. Secondly, the country itself was groaning under a coercive martial law regime and there were
circumstances to suspect that the CPNE was forced into signing on the
dotted lines.

THE HISTORY

The first statute relating to the press was made in the sub-
continent in 1799 when Lord Wellesley's government issued five
regulations, which established complete censorship. Since then till
1947 laws were made by a foreign occupying power to control the freedom
of expression of individuals and also, expressly, the freedom of the
Press. These enactment's had included 1) Press and Registration of Book
(emergency) powers act 1931.

The newly independent state of Pakistan was confronted with a
host of problems. Freedom of expression, freedom of the Press and
freedom of information were the least of the nascent state's immediate
concerns. In fact more restrictions were imposed in the name of
ideology, morality and a host of other concepts capable of abuse in the
hands of an insecure and unstable state power. However, the Press
carried on its struggle for freedom and working journalists, in
particular, bore the brunt of state's repressive policies and actions.

Radio and Television in Pakistan have always remained a state
monopoly. At independence the country inherited only two small radio
stations— at Lahore and Peshawar. The network has since expanded quite
rapidly so that there are today 24 stations and, only recently three
private FM stations were also added to the network. The radio networks
cover some 95 per cent of the national population. Pakistan Television,
which started in 1964, has five stations— at Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad,
Peshawar, and Quetta. Two more TV channels, Shalimar Television Network
(STN) and PTV World supplement the network. Since the arrival of
satellite and cable television, a growing number of people are turning
to these additional sources of information and entertainment.

There are today some 451 daily newspapers and over 4,000 other
periodicals published from various parts of the country. The reach of
these newspapers and publications is limited to no more than about 3-5
million people in a population of 140 million.

Still, successive governments since independence had remained
wary of the print media which until 1959 was allowed to function within
the limits of Press laws inherited from the colonial days. In 1959,
however, the first martial law government of Field Marshal Ayub Khan
lost patience with what he saw as the unfavorable press he and his
government was getting and took over a part of the free press, which
included a number of extremely independent and professionally very
sound English and vernacular newspapers. But when things did not
'Improve' even then the military regime brought the remaining part of
the free press under its indirect control by imposing in 1963 the
dreaded Press and Publication Ordinance (PPO) which turned even the
remaining independent newspapers into no more than government
gazetteers.

In addition, both the print and the electronic media began to be
supervised and regulated by the Ministry of Information and
Broadcasting. As well as exercising direct control over the electronic
media the ministry, through one of its constituent units, the
Department of Reference and Research, began keeping a close eye on the
contents of newspapers and other publications, with a view to gauge
their political loyalties and to stamp out any traces of obscene,
vulgar or other matter deemed undesirable by the government. The
ministry also began exercising control over the general activities of
personnel connected with the newspaper industry, including editors,
journalists, advertisers, and distributors. Occasionally, some journalists were accused of being the government's informants within the media. The Ministry maintained a list of "obstinate" journalists. Those named on this list would be denied even their legitimate right to travel abroad and their access to official sources of information.

Ironically, due to some quirk of events, the Pakistani Press today is functioning under the dreaded PPO of 1963. The other day (August, 6, 2000 to be precise) the Quetta District Magistrate cancelled the declaration of a newspaper (Daily Inqilab), with immediate effect under Section 24 sub-section (1)(F) and section 27 subsection (1) of the Press and Publication Ordinance 1963 (Annex-II).

To understand the reasons why this law is so dreaded it is necessary to refer to some of its provisions here. To begin with, a keeper of a printing press is left totally at the mercy of the district magistrate, an office in Pakistan that has combined judicial and executive functions. For 99 per cent of the time a district magistrate functions as a direct representative of the federal or the provincial government in a purely executive capacity, most often in the form of the deputy commissioner responsible for the administration of a district.

Under section 22, the 1963 Press law makes it compulsory for all printed journals to publish "press notes" (official statements, clarifications, explanations etc.) in their full unedited text. Failure to do so would result in the forfeiture of every copy of the newspaper. Another provision enables the administration to determine if any material published in the Press is "not for the public good". Section 23 requires, whenever the government is of the opinion that the journal had transgressed certain guidelines contained in section 24, to be able to order the printing press concerned to deposit a security with the district magistrate. While the amount of the security is not substantial ranging from a minimum of Rs.500 to a maximum of Rs.30,000 this provision has an intrinsic symbolism of intimidation. Section 24 gives vast powers to the government to close down a printing press in case it is of the opinion that such a press had produced books or journals which violated various norms of propriety and decency. Despite the existence of various safeguards in the same section under "explanations" the section represents an ominous power. In section 26, this morbid fascination within government to wield the power to penalize transgressions by the Press reaches a new height by bestowing power upon the government to declare triple forfeiture: that of the printing press, the publication produced by the press and the security amount deposited for earlier sins. Even the publication of a misleading caption or headline could result in the government demanding from the publisher of a newspaper the deposit of a security under section 27 while sections 28 up to 31 further strengthens and expands the authority of the government to declare forfeiture.

Section 34 empowers the government to authorize a police officer not below the rank of sub-inspector to seize and detain any property which had previously been ordered to be forfeited and in this connection to be able to enter upon and search for such material in any premises. Through section 35, the government arrogates to itself the power to constitute a commission consisting "of such person or persons as it may deem fit" and which would have the powers of a civil court to inquire into the affairs of any printing press or newspaper in general and then to investigate different aspects of its operations. Under the section titled "Appeals" the law gives the impression of reasonableness by providing, under section 49 "Constitution and
jurisdiction of tribunals" a mode for review of executive actions. Persons aggrieved by such actions could approach such tribunals to be headed by a judge of Supreme Court or the High Court and comprising one member representing the government and the third member representing journalists. However, given the powers of a civil court, the tribunal can not pass any ad interim order, which would restrain the government from taking any action against the concerned press, nor is any decision by the tribunal appealable before any court.

Under Part 10 titled “Penalties”, sections 53 to 55 provides for a minimum fine of Rs.2, 000 and a maximum term of imprisonment of up to six months. Under the section titled "Miscellaneous" through section 66, the law gives sweeping and unilateral powers to the government to prosecute every person associated with a company connected to the printing, publishing or editing of a journal, irrespective of whether that person was directly associated with any of these functions. The only exemption provided for is that the person would be exempt from prosecution if the alleged offence against the press law were committed without his knowledge. But then this "prior knowledge" could only be determined in some weeks, months or even years after the initiation of action by the authorities. In the same part of the law, under section 67, the jurisdiction of courts is banned over any actions taken under the aegis of the Press law and states that the declaration of any forfeiture by government is to be deemed valid.

There were a number of occasions when certain sections of this repressive law were used against selected targets. Though the Press continued to struggle against the law and to break many of its literal constraints without always being penalized for the same, the sheer existence of such a blanket law providing vast powers of interpretation to the authorities has helped create an aura of intimidation and coercion.

When the provisions of these restrictive laws are added to other indirect means of control, the Press can be seen to be totally at the mercy of the government of the day. Take for example, the government’s control of newsprint. The purchase of this commodity, vital to the physical existence of the press, was controlled until July this year by the government through the grant of permits.

The Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) is another device by which the government exercises complete power to strangulate the Press by controlling the certification of the circulation of newspapers and journals. This simple device is then used to control, grant or withhold the advertising placed by the government, its departments, corporations and autonomous bodies. The Press Information Department has been given the authority to place this substantial volume of advertisements. This authority is wielded, not on merit, but at the whim of government.

This three-pronged control of the very existence of a newspaper, that is financial through advertisement placing, physical through newprint licensing and both through ABC certification alone act as indirect censorship.

Since 1963, demands for the repeal of the PPO had graduated from occasional calls to becoming a regular and consistent part of the resolutions adopted by the respective representative bodies of journalists and newspapers employees such as Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), the All Pakistan Newspapers Employees Confederation (APNEC), the respective local unions of journalists in each city and town as well as the representative bodies of newspaper editors and owners such as CPNE and APNS (All Pakistan Newspapers Society). In the campaign calling for the repeal of this black law, many working journalists and
newspaper employees and other individuals associated with the editorship and publishing had wielded their pen, organized their colleagues, made hundreds of speeches, suffered imprisonment and hardship and made great sacrifices in this cause. They were also supported by groups of organizations representing citizens and professionals. A turning point in this struggle came with the judgment rendered by Federal Shariat Court in 1984 on a petition filed by one Mr. Tamseel Javed and joined by all the representative bodies of journalists, workers, editors and publishers. The court declared various sections of the Press law to be un-Islamic and called for their deletion or amendment. The then Martial Law government Of General Zaiul Haq went into appeal to the Supreme Court which in January 1988 upheld certain observations of the Federal Shariat Court and disagreed with some other recommendations. In a legal context, there was now a clear consensus on major reform of the law.

In July 1988 when a caretaker government was in place after the elected assemblies were dissolved in May 1988 by the late President General Zaiul Haq, a resolution was adopted by the Senate of Pakistan which is a permanent and indissoluble part of the legislature (this institution was suspended when the military took over the government in Pakistan on October 12, 1999—the fourth military take over in the last 53 years of Pakistan’s existence) calling for the repeal of this law.

NEW ENVIRONMENT

Following this, the environment became appreciably more conducive towards ending the life of a bad statute. So, in September 1988, the then information minister of the caretaker government, Illahi Bux Soomro declared that the government had decided to repeal this law and replace it with a law known as Registration of Printing Presses and Publications Ordinance (RPPO), 1988. And soon this was done. And one thought that law that had become an epithet over a quarter of a century had finally disappeared into history.

The Press law of 1988 which replaced the black law of 1963 reflected an attempt to incorporate some, though not all of the recommendations and observations made over the past two and a half decades ranging from elements contained in the Court judgments on the law and on freedom of expression in the mass media to demands and suggestions made by the representative bodies of the newspaper sector. The new Press law began by making some innocuous but necessary changes such as including the definition of "Province" to mean also applicability to the Federal capital area of Islamabad as well as an expansion in the definition of "Publisher" so as to include any individual acting in such capacity" on behalf of any other person." It also made it mandatory for the District Magistrate to issue a receipt to applicant for the issuance of a declaration for the keeping of a printing press or the publication of a journal so that the applicant could possess documentary proof that an application had been submitted in order to avoid becoming subject to the traditionally convenient mischief of government functionaries who can make applications simply "disappear" from the public record.

The central and most important change in the 1988 Press law was the strategic shift of power, taking arbitrary and sweeping powers away from government, deleting virtually all sections from 25 up to 31 as well as section 35 and replacing these with the concept of respect for the dignity and integrity of individuals associated with the newspaper sector. For example, whereas previously, if there was a change in the venue of the printing press, a fresh permission to publish in the form of a new declaration had to be obtained, now,
whether it was a change in the language of the journal or in the periodicity of its publication, a simple notification to this effect informing the local district magistrate of the changes was adequate. Similarly, where previously if a printer or publisher left Pakistan for overseas for more than three months the declaration would automatically lapse, in this case the margin of tolerance liberally quadrupled to 12 months. In another example of a basic change, whereas previously the district magistrate had virtually unrestricted discretionary power to refuse permission to publish a journal, in the 1988 law if the district magistrate failed to authenticate the declaration for a period of four months, then the publisher and partner would automatically acquire the legal right to commence printing and publication without recourse to any higher level authority.

The new law also gave the highest priority to the right of the applicant to be heard in person by the authority before any deterrent or punitive action was taken with regard to actions such as closure of a press or the forfeiture of copies. Most notably under section 26 of the new law, an aggrieved applicant in the case of any anticipated or already rendered action by government, particularly with regard to seizure of any "objectionable" books or papers had the right to appeal to the High Court and this right also extended to instances where an application for permission to print or publish has been refused by the district magistrate. Further the High Court was required to ensure that the appeal by the aggrieved party is decided within 90 days and, if it deems so fit, award damages to the aggrieved party against an unjust refusal by the government to authenticate the declaration. A vital change was the deletion of the obligation for newspapers to publish in full, the Press notes issued by the government.

In some respects, this law retained provisions of the original 1963 law. For example, the restriction on foreign ownership under Sections 21 of both laws are identical in requiring that a non-citizen of Pakistan can hold shares in any newspaper only with the previous approval of the government and that such participation in ownership shall not exceed 25 per cent of the entire proprietary interest.

Under "special provisions" there was also continuity between both laws, authorizing government to seize prohibited documents, to detain packages in the post and to prohibit transmission of the same. However, there were some improvements in the new law by which packages containing "objectionable material" defined under section 23 can be detained by a customs officer of the rank of assistant collector. But it was mandatory for government to notify that such material has been forfeited by notifying this section within 48 hours of the detention of the package. If no such order was passed within 48 hours, then the government was required to return the books or papers to the person concerned. A new provision under section 33 of the 1988 law balanced the retention of the interventionist authority of government in the case of detaining material being sent through the post by giving the aggrieved party the right to appeal to the High Court for a review of actions by the government. With regard to formal and functional provisions such as making it compulsory for printers and publishers to deliver four copies of every book and journal to the record of the government, the 1988 law continued the same, as also in the case of requiring that a catalogue of books be maintained, registering all books published in the country.
For a variety of reasons, the Press law of 1988 was continued to be re-promulgated as an ordinance from 1988 to 1997. This had happened even though the Supreme Court had ruled that the re-promulgation of an ordinance is unconstitutional because, in the presence of an elected legislature, each ordinance should either be adopted as an Act of parliament after due consideration by the National Assembly or should be allowed to lapse after four months, rather than be re-promulgated. Since this was not done by the elected governments which came to power after the 1988 elections, the courts had from time to time ruled that the 1988 law had stood repealed and replaced by the original PPO 1963. The military government of General Pervez Musharraf, which took over on October 12, 1999, has not yet re-promulgated the 1988 law.

This is the reason why the Quetta magistrate closed down a newspaper invoking the PPO 1963 on August 6, 2000 without the fear of being challenged. However, this is the first stance since perhaps the end of late President General Ziaul Haq’s regime that the PPO, 1963 has been used. In fact, an unwritten agreement seemed to have existed between the governments since September 1988 that they would not use any coercive law to force the Press to ‘behave’, though they did use the clout of newsprint quota, ABC certificate and advertisement rather liberally all these years trying to keep the press under their thumb.

Meanwhile, a number of positive developments had occurred on the media front. As mentioned above Pakistani journalists invited by overseas governments and organizations were required to obtain “no objection” certificates from the ministry of information and broadcasting before being able to utilize such invitations. This restriction was removed in 1988. There also existed an unpublished but very real “black list” of intellectuals, journalists and other citizens who had opposed martial law onwards of 1977, or who were generally critical of the establishment. These names on the black list included eminent poets as well as a number of journalists and media personalities. They were never invited to appear on radio and television. The elected government in 1988 abolished this list.

Between November 1988 when Benazir Bhutto won the elections and prepared to become Prime Minister in December the same year and November 1996 when she was dismissed by President Farooq Leghari, a period in which three elected governments and three caretaker governments held office, no major legal and binding change took place in mass media sector except that the most regressive law, the PPO 1963 reappeared by default, but which seemingly was not recognized by the media nor was it used by the government until the August 6, 2000 incident. The positive changes introduced in the first few months of the first Benazir Government like the elimination of the newsprint quota permit (this was later restored by the first government of Nawaz Sharif) were made through executive decisions and administrative directives. Ironically it was through executive orders that the most negative actions were also undertaken as in the case of the issuance of permits for FM radio stations and a cable TV channel. In one commendable respect, the second government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto acted conclusively to terminate control by government of newspaper management and editorial policy. This occurred when, in the 1995-96 period, the national Press Trust disinvested its share-holding in Pakistan Times and the Urdu daily newspaper Mashriq by selling shares to groups from the private sector on the basis of competitive bidding. This signal change brought to and end a 36-year period of official control over a specific set of newspapers.
Notwithstanding these positive changes, one clearly felt that by 1994 the government of the day, this time an elected government, was losing patience with the level of freedom that was being exercised by the press. Indeed, at least since 1988 the Press had been demonstrating a remarkable sense of vigor and assertiveness. Armed with the protection offered by the fundamental rights enshrined in the 1973 constitution (which had remained suspended until the lifting of martial law in 1988 and which has once again been suspended after the military took over the government on October 12, 1999), newspapers and journalists had been exercising their right to free speech fearlessly, so much so that there were growing complaints from both the government and sections of the general public that the press sometimes tended to behave irresponsibly.

In August 1994 the government threatened to pass a new defamation law which would have imposed severe curbs on its freedom to publish investigative stories about anyone. Their traditional divisions and differences notwithstanding, newspaper publishers put up a united front against these attempts, and compelled the government to enter into negotiations with them. This resulted in an agreement between the publishers and the government according to which the APNS and the CPNE were to jointly draft a code of ethics for the media and a draft framework for a Press Council which would be charged with the task of adjudicating complaints under the code. A noteworthy feature of the agreement was that the code was to be made applicable to the government controlled electronic media as well. It was generally believed then that the code will consist of broadly worded guidelines enjoining the media to avoid publishing any matter which is: immoral or obscene; or which may arouse sectarian, parochial or provincial passions or prejudices or class hatred; or which was likely to bring into hatred or contempt the head of a friendly state; or which may undermine the security or integrity of the nation or its ideology.

Since this agreement, Pakistan has seen three changes of government. But each succeeding government has continued the dialogue with the Press on this vital matter of introducing a code of ethics and setting up of a Press council to enforce this code. The present military government has already held a number of meetings with the representatives of the APNS the CPNE and the PFUJ in this connection.

And in recent months these consultations have acquired a new dimension in view of the ongoing convergence of broadcasting, telecommunications and information technology.

Globalization and the access to information through information technology have thrown challenges to both governments and the print media. Information blocked and denied to people in their own country is regularly received when published and/or broadcast by foreign news outlets. This leads to complete erosion of the credibility of governments in the eyes of the people. In the event, the credibility of the Press also suffers.

The thinking behind the current efforts of the media to help the government make new laws for the media in Pakistan consists of not only wanting to repeal regressive laws, but also a desire to catch up with the best models in the civilized world.

Each society is confronted with vexing questions and difficult choices. Each society has to find its own answers. These may differ at different times. But with the dawn of the 21st century, it is too late in the day to deny the basic assumptions regarding civil liberties and
their exercise, which underlie a democratic dispensation. Freedom of expression, with its necessary concomitant, freedom of the press, is one such civil liberty now universally accepted by all societies claiming to be civilized.

 Freedoms and restrictions have to be continually reviewed. The law has to be re-assessed from time to time to find out whether it is in conformity with the requirements of society at a given point in time. Much may become anachronistic after having outlived its utility in a particular socio-economic or political dispensation. A colonized people may win independence. In such changed circumstances the old legal order must yield the new, decadence must give way to the living and the vigorous, slaves of yesterday must become the masters of today and shape their own tomorrow.

 Keeping in view the socio-economic and administrative conditions in Pakistan, a comprehensive change in media laws and regulatory regimes, particularly with regard to the rules, regulations and procedures, which may affect the supplies of inputs such as newsprint, advertisement and ABC are being discussed at the national level at present. If the latter were allowed to remain unchanged then the legislation on Press Council or right to know would remain meaningless.

 The present military government has already abolished the newsprint quota system by reducing the customs duty for all kinds of importers (including the newspapers) to 2.5 per cent. And it is also in the process of finalizing an agreed Press code of ethics in consultation with the various representative bodies of the Press (Annex. III). This code of ethics will be enforced by the proposed Press Council (Annex. IV) for the setting up of which the government is in constant touch with the Press. Meanwhile, it has already finalized a draft law entitled Right To Information Law (Annex. V). And another draft law called Regulatory Authority for Media Broadcast Authority (RAMBO—Annex, VI) for the establishment of a regulatory authority for electronic media in anticipation of launching of private TV channels for which permissions are expected to be granted sometimes next year has been approved by the federal cabinet. A draft law called the Press, Newspapers and Books Registration (Annex. VII) has also been finalized to replace the PPO 1963. But this proposed law relating to the Press including the regime relating to declarations and their cancellation, what the press can or cannot say or print, penalties, forfeitures, fines and imprisonment has already been rejected by different media organizations including the APNS.

 All these years, most of the mainstream Press in Pakistan has functioned solely in the public interest. And despite the existence of draconian laws, which at times were enforced by ruthless military dictators and at others imposed strict censor codes, the Press, has reported, commented and analyzed in the larger public interest fearlessly and largely fairly. If ever, ethics of the profession were violated or transgressed without any justification by the Press, it was done, more often than not, on the instigation of the government itself or because the Press had been taken in by the official dis-information. The government of the day in Pakistan breaks every code of media ethics while using the controlled electronic media. It blatantly uses the broadcast time against its opponents and for disseminating false and exaggerated propaganda about the successes of its own policies. It suppresses news that does not suit it. The tabloid Press in Pakistan gets its inspiration from the way the successive governments have scandalized on the controlled TV and Radio the governments they had succeeded.
These are very hard times for politicians in Pakistan. The military government justifies the October 12, 1999 take over and its continuance on what it has deliberately tried to project as misgovernance and corruption of the elected political governments of the immediate past. The politicians have been so much maligned in the controlled electronic media and the tabloid press in the last ten months of military government that when a highly libelous book called "Parliament se Bazar-e-Husn tuk" (From Parliament to the Whorehouse) appeared in the market recently few objected to its contents. Those who were clearly libeled in the book completely ignored it fearing perhaps that if they went to court, they would be fighting against a perception, which has by now assumed the dimensions of a reality. And the military government for its own reasons has preferred to look the other way despite having the legal means to tackle the authors. The book is made up of gossip, published newspaper and magazine reports, unpublished but popularly believed stories, salacious jokes, largely unsubstantiated allegations, innuendo, scandal and, as if to prove the rule, a sprinkling of facts. Most of the photographs in the book have been taken from newspapers or magazines. There is a former foreign minister Gohar Ayub Khan dancing tentatively at the Indonesian embassy. The caption makes him into an unworthy Muslim. Then there is a picture of Benazir Bhutto's mother Nusrat Bhutto (whose husband ZA Bhutto was at that time prime minister of Pakistan) dancing with the former US President Gerald Ford. This too has an insulting caption questioning the lady's character. There is also a photograph showing Benazir Bhutto trying to make her way through a crowd of party workers, but the caption suggests that one of the workers has fondled her. Even her so-called 'before and after' alleged nose job pictures have been printed as evidence of her uninIslamic ways. A photograph showing a middle aged woman dancing to celebrate victory of some sorts of the former ruling party, the Muslim League with the wife (Kulsom Nawaz) of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif in the background is also in the book as proof of the Sharif's family's unpermissible ways. And there is a picture of Indian writer and author Khuswant Singh affectionately kissing the teenage daughter of Pakistan's high commissioner in India on her temple. The caption makes the kiss into a sex act. There is an unsubstantiated story in the book, which discovers a romantic connection between Benazir Bhutto with one of her father's close associates, the late Hayat Khan Sherpao. Such scurrilous books and publications have appeared in Pakistan from time to time. But this has happened mostly in the times of military governments, which by their very presence create an atmosphere totally hostile to elective politics and politicians.

However, most of the time, both the government controlled electronic media and the independent Press in Pakistan are guided in their operations by the cultural milieu that exists in the country. Since it is an Asian country, populated mostly by sub-continental Muslims, the media by and large works within the bounds of Islamic and oriental cultural values which are based among other things on the respect for women and which do not sanction the glorification of crime and sex. So, the media in Pakistan has, to a large extent, adhered voluntarily to the normal ethical codes which discourage the unnecessary display of sex and violence and; avoids indulging in libelous and seditious activities. And for the same reason, it has, more often than not, tried to handle with a great deal of sensitivity reports involving rape cases and children.
The main actors in the media world in Pakistan are the newspaper owners, the editors, the working journalists and the information ministry, (which has under its umbrella the PTV and Radio Pakistan). Since most of the past 53 years were spent in acrimony between the Press and the government with the civil society as a whole putting its full weight behind the media in this fight between two unequals, so far there has been no concerted effort by the readers, listeners and viewers to push for an acceptable, workable and enforceable media code of ethics. (Ends)