

# The West and the rest

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**L**et's talk about the colour yellow, the colour of the sensationalist press. The term 'yellow press' arose in the US when William Randolph Hearst's *Journal*, during its circulation war against Pulitzer's *World*, started a derogatory comic picture feature called: 'The Yellow Kid'. Soon the battle between Hearst and Pulitzer came to be called 'yellow journalism'. Today, scare headlines, sensational reporting, biased articles, all fall in the category of yellow journalism. Jaundice causes the whites of patients' eyes to go yellow so he is said to view everything in a yellow or 'jaundiced light'. Thus a biased view is called a 'jaundiced view'. Thus, too, 'yellow journalism'.

No one is saying that governments are all bad and the press all good. There has been a worldwide decline in standards. In Pakistan it has been in all sectors, except sport. The degradation of political leadership, business and agriculture, the arts and entertainment, poetry and literature, are the obvious ones. The education system has become rotten. Healthcare is a scandal. The press is no exception.

What is bad about our press is not unique to us. The western press invented all that and more. However, what is good about the western press is often unique to it. What is good about western governments' dealings with their press is not present in our governments. The main reason why our press has not developed some of those good points is that it has always suffered from government interference that has often descended into harassment and coercion. Western governments don't impose newsprint quotas, control government advertising, or throw journalists in prison on spurious charges.

Those who imagine that *lifafa* or 'envelopmental' journalism is not present in the West are simply naive. *Lifafas* take different forms there, that's all. Where they are ahead of us is that the *lifafa* is not always received, but given, by their press, usually the tabloids, especially the British ones. They pay people to 'kiss and tell', what they call 'cheque book journalism'. Ask any celebrity and they will tell you how they have been victims of cheque book journalism and how their privacy has been violated. Princess Diana was a case in point. This sort of journalism is born out of circulation wars, not to get higher readership for its own sake but to attract more advertising at higher rates for space is sold on the basis of cost to the advertiser per thousand readers. It is called CPM, or 'Cost Per Mille', French for thousand.

In the last couple of decades 'anything to get circulation' started in Pakistan too, though mercifully it is limited largely to the new vernacular press where envelopmental journalists are bringing their peculiar talents to bear. But those who believe them are fools and deserve to live in their ignorance. Rupert Murdoch's *Sun* is the largest selling English newspaper in the world because of its sensational stories and the half-naked girl on page three. Yet when a survey of its readers was held more than 90 per cent said that they read the *Sun* but don't believe it. *Private Eye* has made an art of targeting people,

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being taken to court, losing and paying compensation, for which they must have a large fund. Nothing is worse than the British tabloid. Yet the British Establishment and people live with it. Our governments and readers have to learn to read (and see) certain things for the fun of it and not believe or take it seriously.

Who started the envelope in Pakistan? Was it not the information ministry from its ubiquitous secret fund? Don't the ISI and ISPR have certain journalists on their payrolls to whom they feed 'investigative' stories to further their own political aims? They failed to realise that the wall has two sides. What is good for the goose can also be good for the gander. Once they had tasted blood and seen the glint of gold these same journalists could easily go on to the payroll of political parties and politicians to supplement their 'incomes', which the government now laments.

The government's introduction of the *lifafa* opened the box of Pandora. It should come as no surprise that *lifafa* journalists would also supplement their 'incomes' by blackmailing the rich. What is surprising is that the rich often pay them off instead of telling them to go jump in a lake, unless they have skeletons in their cupboards. Happily, blackmailing journalists are few and the yellow press is small, regardless of conventional wisdom.

Then there are those journalists who, bereft of a constituency, use their editorial space as springboards to getting government jobs. Thus when they do get into government it is usually an unrepresentative one. This happens in the West too. Strobe Talbott was a journalist before he became Deputy Secretary of State. Happily, such 'journalists' are also few and far between.

We have fringe publications too, usually published by obscurantist sectarians accusing anyone and everyone of being a Qadiani or Indian or CIA agent or Zionist spy. So does the West. You only have to look at the publications of the Ku Klux Klan, the National Party, neo-Nazi groups, and even the *Jewish Chronicle* to know that ours are nothing compared to the vitriol they spew out.

But why go on about the prime media? The government has had total control over TV and radio that it has misused, abused, wasted and rendered useless, only to its disadvantage. This media's lack of credibility and brazen promotion of the official version, to the disgust, boredom or amusement of viewers, has done more damage to governments than any publication ever has. That is why, whenever there is a crisis, people switch to foreign channels to get the real news. This happened during Kargil (when we lost the media war to Zee TV) and during 'The Second October Coup'. Is the Government of Pakistan proud of this? Is it not high time that TV was used effectively?

What stops them from inviting politicians to face a television audience to explain their positions? Why can't Kulsom Nawaz tell us on TV the mystery of

how her family's wealth grew at the speed of light so that all of us can learn how to get rich fast? How did they manage to acquire an estate as vast and lavish as Raiwind? Asif Zardari should be brought from prison to tell us the secret of going from rags to riches and Benazir can tell us how to turn a frog into a prince. The mullahs would have a rough time of it in the face of an interviewer educated in pristine Islam. Ask Altaf Hussain publicly whether he is loyal to Pakistan or not? Ask Imran Khan what he really means by accountability? Ascertain from Ejazul Haq what makes him think that he will be Prime Minister? Let Mengal and Achakzai tell what they were doing in the company of Altaf Hussain in London?

The best compares I can think of are General Amjad and Farooq Adam for they would do a better job here than they did at NAB as their attitude and approach is tailor-made for the media. If all the Sharif wealth is legit, what better for Kulsom? If not, the Sharifs would get exposed in front of the people, as would the Bhuttos and many others. Let the people decide. This is not 'trial by media'. This is investigative journalism at its best. Invite the heads of the World Bank and IMF in Pakistan to come and tell us why they knowingly gave loans to corrupt governments. Ask the US ambassador to explain how his government can expect us to hand over their criminals to them without due process but they can harbour our criminals without compunction. The same goes for Her British Majesty's envoy. If they protest they will have to explain how, when they allow such programmes in their own countries and make our envoys squirm under a volley of interrogation by a hectoring interviewer, they expect our governments to put a stop to them?

Let's have a 'Hard Talk' and 'Larry King Live' of our own and place the shoe on the other foot. Refusal to participate would be a comment in itself for they would be seen to be shirking from facing the public.

Western media do this all the time. So do they fortify bias and preconceived images. The villain is invariably an Arab or a Muslim. Pakistan is a nuclear weapon-wielding, terrorist-harboring, heroin-smuggling country. India is India and deserves the bomb. It is the land of antiquity, of myriad sounds, smells and colours. Ignored are Gandhi's blood-splattered non-violence, the 400 million starving souls in 'the largest democracy in the world', the cage girls of Bombay, the Prithvis and Agnis cheek by jowl with Dengue Fever and the Bubonic Plague, the genocide of Kashmiris, the six other freedom-loving struggles. This is how images are created and people set against people. This is how the West's media works in tandem with their governments to further their collective national aims. India is beginning to learn the game, witness the plethora of satellite channels it has started, projecting a country which does not exist outside the studios and which the ordinary Indian is trying vainly to locate. We are still fretting over private TV and the load of the electrical installations of newspapers.

# Emergence of the ethnic me

internet to access the Pakistani press.

Over the years, the ethnic media has not only become a profitable business, it has made significant advances in improving its content. Of course, the internet and new technologies have helped them tremendously. Nonetheless, if the trend continues, ethnic media will become a force to be reckoned with.

The dramatic walkout from General Musharraf's press conference was led by Mr Afaq Khiali and Mr Khalilur Rehman, publishers of the two largest New York-based Urdu weeklies. They were joined by Mr Nasim Akhtar of *Pakistan Voice*, Mr Asrar Kassana of *Pakistan Vision*, Mohsin Zaheer of *Sada-i-Pakistan* and other notable local journalists like Mr Shafique Awan, Mr Tahir and Mr M R Farrukh.

These journalists have been the pioneers of ethnic print media in the US. Over the years, they have made their ventures successful and now their newspapers are read in almost every Pakistani immigrant household in the major cities of the US. Along with Urdu print media, *Pakistan Link* and *Pakistan Voice* are considered to be major English weeklies. In addition, ethnic television and radio programmes are also common in every major North American expatriate enclave.

The ethnic media is very much

aware of its newfound influence in the community and resents when visiting Pakistani leaders do not treat them respectfully. The walkout from General Musharraf's press conference was the result of their exclusion from an earlier press briefing.

Realising the ethnic media's resentment, the officials tried to arrange another meeting between the local media and the chief executive. However, to the astonishment of the

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**The ethnic media will start affecting the political process with regard to the participation of the expatriate community in US politics. Once the ethnic media finds a place in the US political system, it will become more powerful than all the influential lobbyists**

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journalists, the venue was filled with non-journalists which prompted the walkout. The struggle between Pakistani officials and leaders of the ethnic media has been going on for several years and will continue for sometime.

The fact of the matter is that as the immigrant community is maturing in the US. The ethnic media is also becoming a meaningful force. In the past, expatriate organisations have been seeking favours with US based correspondents of the major Pakistani newspapers. However, now

the immigrant community organisations and their leaders are more interested in getting to the ethnic media rather than targeting the Pakistani press.

They realise that they get a better feedback from the expatriate community—their main constituency—if they get publicity in the ethnic media. On the other hand, correspondents of major Pakistani newspapers do not find community activ-

ities newsworthy. And even when their news items relating to the expatriate community are published in Pakistani papers, it is read only by a handful of activists. The expatriate community is out of tune with the Pakistani newspapers. Therefore, a visible shift is taking place with regard to the ethnic media versus Pakistani news establishments.

Not only is the expatriate community assigning more importance to the ethnic media, mainstream US newspapers like *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* have

also started recognising tance. In recent months newspapers incorporate opinions from the ethnic line and offline).

Eventually, the ethnic start affecting the political with regard to the part the expatriate community. Once the ethnic place in the US politics will become more powerful the influential lobbyists now, the ethnic media glued to Pakistani politics away from the US process. With the passage ethnic media will adjust realities.

The ethnic media long way. In its years, the ethnic like all other emerging for whom survival is crucial. The early pioneers very trained as business aware of journalistic

As a result, they compromises, used tactics and sometimes related journalistic ethics stages, they also tried with each other to obtainments from Pakistani entities and played to Pakistani officials.

However, with



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The walkout by some ethnic Pakistani-American journalists from General Musharraf's press conference in New York may have been considered erratic and irresponsible. However, it was an assertion of the Pakistani ethnic media for the recognition that it deserves for its enhanced leverage in the immigrant community. The Pakistani-American Urdu and English newspapers have captivated the readership of all those immigrant Pakistanis who feel more comfortable in reading printed Urdu/English newspapers rather than going to the