**Cost of Secrets** [Suleman Khanzada](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/suleman-khanzada/)

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The cost of keeping [secrets](https://dailytimes.com.pk/528623/secrets-of-germanys-alcatraz-virus-island-revealed/) is the death of truth. Sometimes too much of the truth can be dangerous. Two Pakistani journalists have been killed in the last two weeks. The truth can hinder governance and cause chaos but suppressing it for any reason including national interest is a slippery slope. More often than not it is the first step towards tyranny.

The slide has three phases. One, a convenient justification that permits the state to control the truth once slice at a time. Usually it’s something like ‘National security.’ Two is censorship.the state defangs mediums that deliver that truth like the Media in order control truth directly. Naturally that is met with resistance. That is when the third stage begins – subjugation. The state then takes strict action on anybody including its own citizens if it feels they are disrupting the national narrative.

Pakistan is currently at phase two. The truth is being censored by various powerful segments of society. The terms of CPEC are secret. The terms of IMF are secret. The report on Mafias, that the PM has himselfadmittedare in his own cabinet, which led to a wheat and sugar crisis remain secret. The real story behind Senior Taliban leader Ehsanullah Ehsan’s absurd ‘escape’ from military custody remains a secret.

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A pair of famous Anchors were removed from their show for a second time after criticizing a policy regarding Independent Power Producers. Publisher of an acclaimed international newspaper is embroiled under rape allegations, which the accused insists are a result of his papers editorial policies. Government Ads, an important source of revenue for media houses, are being allocated on a carrot-and-stick basis. Sindhi journalist Aziz Memom was found in dead in a ditch last week.

PEMRA, the government’s media regulatory body, is frequently floating notices. The strangest one issued last October, banned news anchors from giving their personal opinions because they were not ‘experts’ resulting in some anchors comically displaying their university degrees and resumes before speaking. Fawad Chaudry, the ruling party’s former media czar, said Pakistan media should be watched less, instead its better the people watch sports or entertainment shows more. That is ironic, since his own Prime Minister admitted that he had no idea the Rupee was in free fall against the dollar 2019, he only learned of it on the news. So if the PM was watching a cricket match instead, does that mean the Rupee would have fallen even lower?

That begs the question what’s next. The answer is WE the people are next. Mediaowners, editors, senior anchors and journalists number a few dozen at most. Once they are reigned in then the burden of being a ‘watchdog’ will fall on the general population. Various people will rebel and resist, and share their views or grievances on other platforms like social media. They could be activists, netizens, intelligentsia, civil societies or just regular people.

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The stage is being set for Phase three – subjection. The brazen and ridiculous set of rules on regulating social media that the federal government just approved would shock even George Orwell. It gives a preview of what the state apparatus has in mind.

Prime Minister Imran Khan in his golden opposition days warned that the first thing a corrupt regime does is silence the media. But everyone agrees Imran Khan is not corrupt so why is he so hell-bent on curbing the media?

He, in his opinion is governing his level-best with the purest of intentions. After becoming the head of state, he now knows what he always suspected, that the previous regimes were ruthlessly corrupt and merciless with their borrowing crippling the nation with enormous debt. PTI officials say Khan’s corrective measures will take time to bear fruit, but not if the hue and cry of the public magnified by the media cause hysteria and chaos. They are implying that in the name of national interest content needs to be controlled so the government can be given room to perform.

A second perspective is of national security. Pakistan is surrounded by hostile neighbors. The Insurgency in Kashmir, The love-hate relationship with the tribal Paktuns, India’s presence in Afghanistan, the fickle relationship with Iran, and the cruel and unpopular foreign policies of Saudi Arabia which Pakistan often has to align with all constantly put Pakistan in between the devil and the deep blue sea. Most of these conflicts are “cold wars” and not full-blown open conflicts. Since the situation is delicate then so should the coverage be.

Both arguments are logical. But that begs the question, does that justify censorship? Absolutely not. In the short run controlling the truth will provide ease for the state and what government doesn’t want compliant subjects. However, compliance leads to complacency and that stagnates whatever progress and prosperity the state aspires to bring. Eventually censorship and subjugation become the primary tools for a regime to stay in power however unpopular. Silence is golden, but not all that glitters is gold. There is no Pakistani government in history that owes more to print, electronic, and social media than PTI. They would do well to know that eventually they may require that once again.

*The writer can be reached at skhanzada@ymail.com*