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A Critical Analysis of Mushrraf's Policies towards Media

Sadia Naaz

Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Government College University Faisalabad.
Sadiahussain160@yahoo.com

Dr. Mian Muhammad Azhar (Corresponding Author)

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science Government College University Faisalabad.
muhammad.azhar@gcuf.edu.pk

Abstract:

It is very surprising to learn that media success was significantly documented in military times, and more specifically in Pervez Musharraf's tenure. This growth in mass media has resulted in freedom of expression, which had become a source of contention for the retired general himself. Political pressure on the media is an inescapable aspect of Pakistan, and it is always typically done indirectly. The government had also directly outlawed or officially suppressed popular television networks by using draconian legislation. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), which was established to support and flourish the mass media industry, has been used several times by influential and dominant players to quiet the broadcast media by suspending licenses, seize the equipment or simply threatening to do so. Though, Pakistan's media has come under increased scrutiny, since Musharraf sparked a political and legal crisis.

Keywords: *Freedom of Press, Information Manipulation, Independence of media, Media censorship laws, Media regulations*

Introduction

As the head of the army, Musharraf was not used to hearing anything negative about him, so he was not thrilled with the media. He never responded to criticism with logic, but always with force. He saw the media as his greatest danger despite possessing unrestricted authority; therefore, he employed a variety of diabolical tactics to control, repress, and subvert it. The passing of the PEMRA ordinance was one of the worst instances of his nefarious use of authority and danger to media freedom. "They intend to effectively shut us down throughout the majority of Pakistan" (Sethi, 2008). The conflict between the government and the media has therefore begun. He was repeatedly committing crimes, such as political victimization, corruption, the disappearance of individuals, privatizing a steel plant, etc., and the media was exposing him for each one by showing the public the truth.

Critical Analysis of Musharraf's Policies towards Media

In addition to PEMRA, he suppressed the media using other methods. He imprisoned the journalists and then used covert means to abduct and torture the working journalists to get them to alter their minds. The Musharraf administration frequently issued various threats to journalists. General Musharraf ruled in an authoritarian manner within a weak democratic system rather than the will of the people. In 2002, he allegedly brought back democracy, but in the meantime, he tried to gain wider powers for his position. As President, he had the power to dissolve Parliament at will. He was in charge of security policies as Army Chief.

On June 4th, a period of journalistic freedom in Pakistan was almost over. The president, General Pervez Musharraf, gave the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) additional authority by proclamation, enabling it to close broadcasters' premises, stop the use of equipment, and revoke working permits. The tremendous uproar caused his government to reverse course and halt the ordinance until the committee had time to evaluate it within a few days (Watch, 2007).

Additionally, charges against 200 journalists who disobeyed a prohibition on such demonstrations by participating in a protest in the nation's capital, Islamabad, were dismissed. The government has previously pushed cable television providers in the nation's capital to pull several stations from the air in the name of national interest. They had disobeyed the "unofficial" orders of ousted Chief Justice of Pakistan Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry not to broadcast live footage of rallies against General Musharraf. According to the president of Jeo, in a talk show, we were talking about the involvement of the military in Pakistani politics when suddenly everything went blank, which was surprising to us (rsf.org, 2007).

Numerous activists were detained on June 6 in advance of protests intended to show support for Mr. Choudhary scheduled for the following day. Newspapers were reportedly the next targets on the government's hit list since the government would not accept cartoons or commentary that "defamed" General Musharraf and the armed forces. The action came as a result of a conference of senior military leaders, presided over by the general, where "strong exception" was taken to media coverage and programs "maligning" the Army (Chaudhuri, 2008).

It used to be friendly between the carping general and the daring general. When General Musharraf resigned in 1999, the Pakistani media showed little sympathy for the ousted "democratic" Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, because of his criticism of him. In fact, General Musharraf was praised for supporting the expansion of private television and radio stations as well as a free press. Although their predecessors strongly opposed that development, there were several FM radio stations and more than forty TV channels (Hussain, 2012). By giving open interviews and accepting criticism as constructive correction, General Musharraf won over the media. But since Mr. Chaudhary had such remarkable support, the general, like his predecessors, began to see him as part of his problem.

In 2007, just as parliament was about to convene, the president issued an executive order banning the press (Kronstadt, 2007). It was challenged in court as it violated fundamental rights. Additionally, it raised constitutional concerns as the President could issue short-term ordinances when Parliament was not in session. Even worse, PEMRA would be permitted to enact new regulations ad hoc and without consulting lawmakers. Additionally, several provisions of the

original charter that allowed the press to be heard by a council of grievances before being penalized are repealed by the law. Angering the administration for abandoning freedom on the altar of political damage control only months before the general and presidential elections, the beleaguered press retaliated. Most commentators believed it to be an indication of political adequacy. Others went even further, asserting that General Musharraf's government had begun to fall apart (Zaidi, 2023). General Musharraf appeared to be both embarrassed and a touch desperate after his prime minister pledged to put off the implementation of a presidential directive (Cameron, 2008).

According to another claim, Musharraf's demise began after a confrontation with the media, and it is apparent that the media played a crucial part in the success of every campaign against him. Musharraf therefore acted against the media most of the time and was always trying to control it. The criticism of his acts towards the media is provided here.

Method and Material

This study adopted analytical and descriptive designs to critically analyze the Musharraf's policies against media; however, Musharraf used a variety of tactics. Pakistan has never had sustained press freedom. Various regimes employed legal and constitutional tools to keep the press out of public discussion and criticism. However, for around nine years, throughout Musharraf's military and civil governments, the Media operated in a mixed manner. Data for the article is collected from secondary sources which include newspapers, books, journals, and documents.

PEMRA Ordinance

On March 1st, 2002, General Musharraf issued the order. The law was enacted in principle to control the media, but in reality, it was used as a weapon to victimize, restrain, and oppress the media (Aziz & Khalid, 2017). It was employed against media outlets that Musharraf did not control. Musharraf used a variety of tactics during the period of his rise to power to establish his will as the law of the land. After gaining public support, Musharraf was irritated by the media's lack of control, so he drafted the ordinance to change things in his favor under the guise of legislation. The ordinance's initial implementation was not very successful since relations between the media and Musharraf's administration were getting worse. Because of the PEMRA ordinance's frequent application, the three years ending in 2005, 2006, and 2007 were the worst for the media (Wahid, 2007). The events against the media that occurred between 2005 and 2007 are detailed below:

Actions Taken under PEMRA

According to research by Sevanty Ninan, Shayoni Sarkar, and Deepti Bharthur, Musharraf frequently used PEMRA's "black law" to repress the media between 2005 and 2007. Legal action was being taken against not only TV broadcasters but also FM stations and print media.

Mushraff's Measures towards PEMRA in 2005

1. PEMRA staff members and police squads conducted a raid on a private FM station on Shahra-e- Faisal Road in Karachi on November 15, 2005. According to PEMRA rules, it was claimed that the radio station was airing unauthorized foreign transmissions. The station was not taking orders from Musharraf and his cronies, so in actuality, action was taken. Sheikh Rasheed Ahmad, who was then the federal minister of information, declared, "No radio station can do that because it is against the law. To release the confiscated equipment to the radio station in issue, I have requested that the relevant authority obtain an agreement from it.

2. On December 22nd, 2005, Khalid Shaikh, the head of the Pakistan Cable Operators Association, told the media that PEMRA officials had given us a list of 21 stations that would be shut down (Dawn, 2006). For this measure, the administration provided no convincing justification; some of those channels were also Indian. This blatant abuse of the law was to be expected by onlookers. It was obvious that the PEMRA was passed solely for the purpose of stifling and controlling the media.

On December 30, 2005, Iftikhar Rashid, the head of the Print and Electronic Media Regulatory Authority, said that 60 TV channels and 12 FM stations had been shut down(Haq, 2010). Additionally, he spoke about the closure of several cable TV stations due to claims of pornographic content. However, the underlying goal was to use that law to establish control of the government, not to make everything legal and compliant with the law.

Mushraff's Measures towards PEMRA in 2006

The government continued to use PEMRA to establish itself as a powerful authority among the TV networks. Similar to 2005, efforts were made in 2006 to let the media know that the government was actively using its considerable power (Rasul1 & McDowell, 2012). The details of some of the government's acts under the influence of PEMRA are as follows:

1. The conflict between the government and the media reached a breaking point in 2006. Therefore, the administration intended to take certain steps against the media once more to intimidate them. Two Afghan TV stations were shut down on March 17, 2006, and the reason given was that the networks lacked the necessary broadcasting licenses (region, 2016).

2. A PEMRA team stormed a madrassah operating an FM radio station in Peshawar on June 7, 2006, and demanded that they turn over their equipment. Following that, PEMRA shut down and banned 156 FM radio stations. However, the justification was that they were disseminating jihadi propaganda via FM (Commission, 2006).

3. On November 10, 2006, the Print and Electronic Media Regulatory Authority in Karachi abruptly stopped a Sindh-based TV channel's broadcasting without justifying. The cable providers in Karachi were warned in writing not to show Sindh TV, and if they did, legal action would be taken against them. It was discovered that the TV was airing documentaries with a particular focus on the issues in rural Baluchistan. Razzaq Surai, the director of news at Sindh TV, stated that "we were not

given a notice or warning, and when we tried to contact them, their offices had already closed for the day. We could do nothing since it was a national holiday. This type of behavior demonstrated that the authority was acting not in the public interest but rather for the benefit of the Musharraf administration.

Mushraff's Measures towards PEMRA in 2007:

More and more serious proceedings against media were being taken in 2007 under the auspices of the Print and Electronic Media Regulatory Authority. PEMRA began to exert its authority on little issues and inconsequential acts, but due to the tight relationship between the media and the government, its goal has expanded to encompass the major and well-known private television networks (Mughal, 2009). Details of the measures PEMRA took against the media in 2007 are as follows:

1. On April 22, 2007, PEMRA sent a show-cause letter to the private television network AAJ TV (BRecorder, 2007). The TV station received a notice for running talk programs and other conversations concerning judicial crises, and the rationale stated was that while the matter was still pending in court; discussing court problems on air may have an impact on the judge's decision. In actuality, the judicial crisis was putting pressure on the administration, and it was not pleased with the media's involvement and coverage of the demonstrations. As a result, the authority threatened to shut down the TV station if it disobeyed government orders. PEMRA also forbade all private news outlets from airing debates that would influence the judiciary and compromise the military's honor and from reporting on the unrest and demonstrations that occurred during the legal crisis.

2. Notices to discontinue transmitting Royal TV were sent to cable providers in the capital city of Islamabad and the neighboring city of Rawalpindi on April 27, 2007, by the Print and Electronic Media Regulatory Authority. Due to coverage of the Chief Justice's support protests following his removal from office, Royal TV has been off the air since the morning of April 24 (Guardian, 2007). PEMRA, however, refuted the notice's issue, and the head and secretary general of the Rawalpindi/Islamabad Union of Journalists rejected PEMRA's denial.

3. On September 29, 2007, Islamabad's authorities blocked the broadcast of many private television channels to prevent them from broadcasting protests against Musharraf's reelection as president. Many TV stations said that only people with access to satellite television could view their programming and that virtually no one could view television programming through cable. It was an accurate reflection of how Musharraf's administration of the system and application of the law was carried out. The media was humiliated by these types of blackmailing, which were widespread at the time, and cable companies were compelled to discontinue transmitting TV channels that disobeyed orders from the government.

4. On December 11, 2007, the Print and Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) once again issued a warning, that time stating that some TV channels airing via satellite were accepting live calls from viewers and that the constituted propaganda against

> Pakistan's defenseless civilians. The license or permit holder must adhere to PEMRA Ordinance LXV of 2007, according to a notification sent out by the PEMRA Head Office on Tuesday. Furthermore, it is stated that any broadcaster who breaches the terms and conditions of the PEMRA ordinance, rules and regulations, and code of conduct may be subject to a period of imprisonment that may not exceed three years, a fine that may not exceed ten million rupees or both (Pirzada, 2007).

These actions ascertained the role of PEMRA as a regulatory authority, it clearly showed that the authority was a mere tool in the hand of the dictator to threaten, suppress, and curb the media. It reflected the nature of work in different departments of the government and showed how Musharraf used the law or made ordinances to make things in his favor. He claimed himself as the founder of the present media but through the ordinances like PEMRA, he contributed the most to suppress and curb the freedom of the media (Khan, 2009).

Furthermore, as proven by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Ordinance of June 2007, media autonomy is far from entrenched. To limit journalistic freedom, the government employs a variety of legal and constitutional tools. The closure of commercial TV news networks coincided with the proclamation of a state of emergency in late 2007. The edict issued by President Gen. Pervez Musharraf grants the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulation Authority (PEMRA) unrestricted authority to suspend broadcast transmissions, shut offices, confiscate equipment, revoke licenses, and tenfold raise fines for infractions (Khan S. , 2007). The government has already imposed significant limitations on live broadcasting.

Tussle between Musharraf and Media and its Closures:

In addition to PEMRA, the government employed additional resources to bring the media under control, including closures and bans. Allegedly, the media was suppressed through the employment of police, so-called judges from the era, and other law enforcement organizations. Some of the measures taken against people who disobeyed Musharraf's advice is listed below:

On February 26, 2006, Mubarak Ali Shah's suit against the Geo Television Network was accepted by the Lahore High Court. The petitioner claimed that the TV station aired a program that diminished public trust in the courts. This all took place on behalf of the government to restrict and stifle the TV station. The TV station was threatened with penalties for not following the dictator's wishes and for covering and broadcasting the anti-government demonstrations. Such a threat exposed the political authority's true objectives, which were not in the best interests of Pakistan's ordinary people but rather were open to everyone and in favor of the ruler. In another event, on May 5, 2006, three TV channels were turned down on the instruction of the government in Karachi and southern Sindh. The unlawful influence was used to prevent the Sindhi people from watching the live broadcast of the Chief Justice's caravan when it arrived in Lahore. The act was wholly opposed to media freedom and freedom of speech, and it also demonstrated how humiliated the administration was and how they were unable to accept anything that was being proven to be against them (Bashir, Shafiq, Arshad, & Bakht, 2020).

On the incident of Benazir Bhutto, the chairwoman of the Pakistan People's Party was placed under house arrest on November 9 in Islamabad, foreign television stations CNN and BBC were

shut down. She planned to organize a party meeting at the nearby park to protest the restrictions on gatherings. The following day, both stations were once again broadcast after the demonstrators who had been calling for her support had vanished. On November 17, the government used its clout to shut down all of Geo News, the primary TV network in the nation, at one in the morning. (Pracha, 2009) They were known to criticize the government, were well-liked and often listened to by the public. According to sources, Musharraf personally intervened to halt the broadcast of Geo News. It showed the influence of media among the people and also showed that how the rulers were annoyed with the media people.

Restrictions by Musharraf on Media

The actions of the government were not limited to the use of law enforcement agencies and the evil use of PEMRA ordinance but the government also used many other tactics to increase the dependence of media on government. They hit the media legally through PEMRA, used power through law enforcement agencies and secret agencies to threaten the media persons, and banned on media to make them weak financially. Following are also some of the bans and blocks on the media by the government:

First of all, on June 8, 2005, the Executive Committee of the All Pakistan Newspapers Society and the Standing Committee of the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors held a joint meeting in Lahore to discuss the action of the government of banning the governmental advertisement on Nawa-e-Waqt, Daily Dawn, The Nation, and other newspapers. All the participants condemned that cowardly act of the government whose purpose was clear to make the newspaper economically weak. The attempt was enough to guess the evil plans of the government under the command of Musharraf.

In addition, **o**n August 20, 2005, the Federal Interior Minister issued directives to ban the monthly magazines 'Hatif-e-Mehdi' and 'The Voice of Mehdi' by the banned author Gohar Shahi. The orders were also carried out to seize the forfeits of the magazines under section 99-A of the Criminal Procedure Code of 1898. These instructions were merely an action to disturb the media people and to convince them that the real power rests in the hands of Pervez Musharraf and he would not allow any hindrance in his self-interested activities. Furthermore, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority banned the website of the World Sindhi Institute on July 28, 2006, which was based in Washington. The Executive Director of World Sindhi Institute, Munawar Laghari alleged that the government banned the website because they had documented the violation of Human Rights in Sindh which annoyed the government and they took the baseless action against them. The website alleged that the banning of the website was against human rights and freedom of expression. On August 12, 2006, Paris-based organization of journalists named Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF) criticized the government as the government increased by 34 the list of block websites. The newly blocked websites included Baloch Nationalists' website, online radio stations, and Sindhi websites. Daily Islam, Weekly Islami, and Monthly Al-Abraar were banned by the government. However, several journalists held a protest on March 16, 2007, against the ban outside the governor's house in Karachi. The Islamic newspapers and magazines were banned because they contained material against America which was not acceptable for Musharraf as he was a supporter of the Super Power in the so-called war against terrorism (Memon, 2023).

Conclusion

If we critically analyze the policies of Musharraf towards the media, it will be clear to all that he was always looking for an opportunity to suppress the media which did not act in his favor. He used different means at different times to realize his policy against the media which seemed to him the expose of his evil acts. He used PEMRA as much in his favor to curb the media as he could and was confident after taking those shameless acts. He had many people to defend those acts which were clear like crystal to everyone that the acts had only the personal interests of Musharraf. Despite many legal actions, security agencies operations and attacks, threats of different nature, detentions of journalists, and even illegal detentions and tortures, the media remained committed to its work. That kind of courage in media was because of the popular support of the people and that was the reason that media became more and more popular. The people of Pakistan have proved that they need a powerful and loyal source as a stimulus like the media to make their way to a well-progressed and developed Pakistan in the future.

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