



Background Paper

Prospects of Improving Pakistan-India Relations through Media

August 2012



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PILdAT
Pakistan Institute of
Legislative Development
And Transparency

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Foreword

This background paper on **Prospects for Improving Pakistan-India Relations through Media** has been authored by **Mr. Javed Jabbar**, renowned intellectual and former Senator and Federal Minister of Pakistan, for the 4th round of the India-Pakistan Parliamentarians Dialogue, facilitated by PILDAT.

This paper highlights the brief history of the past and current state of media in bilateral relations between Pakistan and India, the fallout of media blockade, steps and role of media in improving the relations.

As an independent think-tank, PILDAT believes that while diplomatic channels for Dialogue must continue, Parliamentarians from both countries should be facilitated on both sides for a greater interaction and developing a better understanding for resolving issues that lead diplomatic initiatives. It is for this objective that PILDAT has been facilitating Parliamentarians Dialogues between Pakistan and India.

Disclaimer

The views, opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of PILDAT.

Islamabad
August 2012

About the Author



Mr. Javed Jabbar is Chairman & Chief Executive, JJ Media (pvt.) Ltd., Karachi. His diverse interests include: public policy analysis, voluntary development service, environment, mass communication, writing and film-making. As part of his voluntary work, in 2008, he was re-elected (2009-2012) as one of the 4 global Vice Presidents of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the world's largest environment organization. He has founded, co-founded, and leads several development organisations including think tanks and research centers. He has served in 3 Federal Cabinets of Pakistan and in the Senate. His Ministerial portfolios have included Information & Media Development, Petroleum and Natural Resources and Science & Technology & National Affairs.

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Introduction

As in the case of any two nation-States, but perhaps more so in the Pakistan-India context, several far-ranging and complex factors shape bilateral relations. These include: geography, history, religion, culture, territory, identity, ideology, armaments, competition, education, economics, aspirations...and the role of media.

While media have the unique function of reporting on all the other factors, of promoting perceptions and setting an agenda, media per se, by and in themselves are not the sole decisive determinant factor for an improvement in relations.

Steps need to be taken in each of those factors where there is an impediment to improvement. To the extent that media are also part of the impediment --- and they often are! --- there media leaderships have a vital responsibility to fulfill.

In 2012 we should recall and take inspiration from a historic event in 1950.

Shortly after the signing of the Liaquat-Nehru pact in April 1950, editors and senior journalists of both countries met in New Delhi a few days later in May. They took note of the violence in then-recent times significantly worsened due to inaccurate, incendiary reporting, imbalanced analysis and misperceptions generated by the content of radio broadcasts and reports published in newspapers and journals. They deeply regretted the consequences of lapses and resolved to prevent recurrence in the future.

Despite the fact that the good resolve of May 1950 soon dissolved in the acid of revived acrimony --- and both reality and media content became abrasive --- there abides the need to revive the spirit of 1950 to energize a new outlook in 2012 and beyond.

A new kind of partnership should be created between, on the one hand, the political and parliamentary leaderships of both countries and, on the other, the media leaderships of both countries. Such collaboration will help establish candid, regular communication, foster trust-building and mutual respect in order to transcend respective traditional, self-imposed fears and doubts. The suggested linkages can initiate a new era of improved knowledge about each other and greater respect for each other. However difficult and elusive as the goal may seem, the ultimate vision of a non-violent, productive, dynamic South Asia obliges us to persevere.

Phases

The historic state of media relations between Pakistan and India from 1947 to 2012 can be divided into the following six phases:

Inherited in August 1947

1. Radio: All India Radio (AIR) already in existence; Radio Pakistan created overnight.
2. Cinema: Bombay was the main centre; Lahore, a secondary centre.
3. Books: with limited readership.
4. Newspapers and magazines: mainly in English.

1947 – 1965

1. Radio: continued monopoly of State-owned AIR, Radio Pakistan, music and occasional messages broadcast by Radio Ceylon to audiences in the two countries e.g. Binaca Geet Mala, a weekly program of Indian film songs.
2. Cinema: some Pakistani films screened in Indian theatres, and vice versa.
3. Books: with limited readership.
4. Newspapers and magazines: exchanged mainly in English.
5. Music records.

1965 – 1971

1. Radio: continued monopoly of State-owned AIR, Radio Pakistan, music and occasional messages broadcast by Radio Ceylon to audiences in the two countries, e.g., Binaca Geet Mala, a weekly program of Indian film songs.
2. With the 1965 War: cinema films, books, newspapers, magazines, music records: banned or erratically-available or smuggled/unofficial.

1970s

1. Radio: continued monopoly of State-owned AIR, Radio Pakistan.
2. Video Home System (VHS): Indian movies, PTV plays, etc. watched by viewers in the other country.
3. Satellite TV: Lahore TV (Pakistan) and Amritsar TV (India), seen on the other side.
4. Cinema films, books, newspapers, magazines, music records, audio cassettes of music records: banned or

erratically-available or smuggled/unofficial.

1980s/1990s onwards

1. Radio: continued monopoly of State-owned AIR, Radio Pakistan.
2. Satellite TV (1990s): programmes about one of the two countries viewed on BBC World Service, CNN etc. by viewers in the other country.
3. VHS: Indian movies, PTV plays, etc. watched by viewers in the other country.
4. Cinema films, books, newspapers, magazines, music records, audio cassettes of music records: banned or erratically-available or smuggled/unofficial.

Current State

The current state of media exchange between the two countries can be itemised as follows:

2000 onwards

1. **Radio:** while both State-owned networks continued, there is an advent of private FM radio networks within each country but signal range is mainly limited to internal areas rather than with cross-border reach.
2. **Internet:** media content becomes instantly available to audiences/users on both sides of the border through websites of newspapers, magazines, TV channels, radio, YouTube, blogs.
3. **Mobile media:** cell-phones, iPads, Tablets, Smart phones etc. introduce radical changes.
4. **On satellite TV channels in each country:** frequent glimpses of Indian cinema content, other content, relatively very little Pakistani content on Indian TV channels.
5. **Cinema films:** sharp increase in Bollywood films on Pakistani cinema screens, only a few Pakistani films on Indian screens.
6. **Cable TV in Pakistan:** in-house channels of cable TV distributors screening pirated Bollywood films and other Indian content.
7. **CDs, DVDs** of music, songs, and films continue to be pirated/smuggled in either country.
8. **FM radio channels in Pakistan** frequently broadcast Indian songs, very few Pakistani songs on Indian FM channels.
9. **Pakistani pop singers/rock groups in Indian Bollywood films,** public concerts, etc. relatively very few Indian artists visiting Pakistan.
10. **Books by Pakistani authors** published in India and selling in both countries, with few reciprocal examples.
11. **Limited and erratic availability in Pakistan of hard copies of Indian magazines** and virtually no hard-copies of newspapers of either country in the other country for various reasons including lack of daily airline flights between major cities.

Note:

1. During the past 65 years, with breaks caused due to wars, tension, etc. fairly regular visits by Pakistani music artists, poets to India and comparatively less visits to Pakistan by Indian artists and poets.

2. During the past 22 years, i.e., particularly after the formation of the South Asian Media Association in Colombo in April 1991, face-to-face meetings, periodic conferences and seminars attended by editors, columnists, authors, TV personnel, etc. have been taking place on a sporadic but more or less annual basis.

Impact of the Ban

The impact of the ban/blockage of not showing each other's news and entertainment TV channels has had the following effect on bilateral relations:

1. In the context of news channels, except for a small percentage of citizens in each country who use the Internet to access newspaper websites/TV channels of the other country on a daily or regular basis, the vast, overwhelming majority of the people of both countries **live in either complete ignorance of many vital aspects of each other's daily lives as a nation, or with very little awareness.**

Events which receive prominent coverage are conflicts, terrorist incidents such as Mumbai-November 2008; major cases of violence/terrorism; Samjhota Express incident; Kargil, assassinations, changes of President, Prime Minister, Central Governments, earthquakes, floods, summit meetings, cricket or hockey matches, music and entertainment, etc.

But the media of both countries do **not** report to their domestic audiences any aspect of the peaceful, productive, dynamic, wide-ranging aspects of each nation's day-to-day life.

This is partly due to the very nature of news media content, which tends to be morosely fixated on events and bad news on the adopted premise that only bad news is good news.

A second reason is that newspapers in both countries devote comparatively little space on a daily basis to aspects of the other country. This is part of what is, in any case, low volumes of coverage given to international news. TV news channels in India are pre-occupied with only bad news from Pakistan. They **rarely** cover non-event-related yet thematically significant subjects.

2. Coupled with factors such as lack of mass cross-border travel and trade as well as limited or biased content in the curriculum/syllabi of schools, colleges, etc., there is a widespread tendency to see each other in stereo-typical or negative terms, specially on political issues.

3. The remarkable liberalism with which Pakistani cinemas screen Bollywood movies and every TV household in Pakistan has access to Indian movies through pirated screenings is **not** reciprocated in India. The reasons cited for this lack of balance are: the far larger number of Indian movies produced than the few Pakistani films available; greater linguistic diversity of India compared to Pakistan which makes Pakistani Urdu/Punjabi/Pushto films inaccessible to major parts of India's population; a far larger number of Indian TV channels that already have to be accommodated before one or two slots can be made available for Pakistani channels, the adverse reaction in India to the recurrent episodes of terrorism or tension blamed on Pakistan, etc.
4. That said, at the same time, there is **a curious, perverse benefit** of lack of daily access to the news TV channels of one country by the other country. This benefit is the prevention of the raising of public anger or hostility to the other country! If audiences in Pakistan in particular were to absorb on a daily basis the hysteria and the hype which Indian news TV channels use to report about Pakistan then it is likely that there will be increased hostility to an improvement in bilateral relations.
5. Fortunately, it is in such a situation that the odd maxim of "*no news is good news*" becomes so true. Accustomed to the narcotic of watching Bollywood songs and dances on a daily basis, Pakistani citizens are generally willing to support improved relations as they are not provoked on a daily basis by some of the intense content critical of Pakistan seen on Indian news media.
6. There is one distinctly negative effect of the distorted, imbalanced manner in which Indian news media report on Pakistan – with only one or two exceptions – and of the ban on news TV channels and news media. This effect is that the political leadership in both countries remains unduly inhibited and cautious in changing the conventional relationship for the better. In turn, this is because of perceptions framed by the news media in such a manner that any initiative for better relations is easily mis-represented by the Opposition and the news media as an undue concession to the other side. In such instances, the Opposition and the media know that they have a captive audience to pander to, because the knowledge-level of the audience is at a low,

chauvinistic level.

7. But the imperatives that come with the sheer fact of being two immediate neighbours, of being two of the world's ten largest populations, of sharing many fundamental challenges to reduce poverty, illiteracy, sickness and suffering amongst tens of millions of people demand that the level of awareness about each other on a daily basis should be elevated to a plane which enables understanding, mutual respect, constructive co-operation and collective progress.

The news media can play a decisive role in achieving that high level provided news media modulate and refine their conceptual approach to news and analyses about the other country.

Steps for Improving Relations

A pre-condition for improvement in relations comprises:

- a) Tangible, visible progress on the peaceful resolution of core disputes and issues i.e. Kashmir, Siachin, Sir Creek, water sharing.
- b) Purposeful co-operation with measurable results to reduce terrorism/subversion allegedly secretly supported by agencies of one country against the other country.
- c) Growth in trade, cross-border investment, grant of Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) status by both countries and beneficial consequences for the two countries.
- d) Resumption and sustained contacts in sports by the exchange of teams, competitors directly visiting the other country instead of meeting in a third country.
- e) Growth in mass travel across borders, ease in obtaining visas, ending of police reporting requirements for visitors, etc.
- f) Revision of textbooks, attitudes of teachers during verbal lectures etc. about how the other country, the pre-dominant religion/s of the other country, etc. so as to end explicit or subtle demonization, vilification, etc. of the other people.
- g) Positive changes in how both news media and entertainment media report to audiences in their own country about the other country.

While media as in “g” above can begin to initiate positive changes on a **simultaneous** basis to the progress achieved in the other preceding respects from “a” to “f” as above, it needs to be remembered that being mirrors, media are obliged to reflect the harsh or the pleasant reality, as the case may be. Therefore, media cannot move far ahead of reality. At the most, they can be only one or two steps ahead of actual conditions on the ground. Being rooted in the origins and the perceptions of national interests of their own respective host-nation-States, the media are obliged to be patriotic and even chauvinistic while sacrificing balance and the whole truth.

Steps in the media domain to help improve bilateral relations can include the following:

1. Systematization, institutionalization of regular interaction through the formation of a NEW Pakistan-India Media Forum between:
 - a) Media proprietors/chairpersons/CEOs
 - b) Editors
 - c) Content controllers of electronic media
 - d) Presenters, anchors, columnists
 - e) Reporters of both countries
2. Regular, minimally annual meetings between EXISTING forums e.g. The Newspaper Editors' Guild of India and the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors, Pakistan; the Pakistan Broadcasters' Association and its Indian counter-part, etc.

Presently such meetings either do not take place at all or do so only under the aegis of other forums.

3. As contacts to date tend to be dominated by English language media in both countries, new initiatives and inter-actions to be launched between the relevant personnel, as enlisted under no. 1 above, of INDIGENOUS language media which reach the vast majorities in both countries. A fine example are the initiatives taken by the South Asian Editors' Forum (SAEF, presently inactive!) between 1999 and 2005.
4. Formation of partnerships/twinning linkages between leading media groups of both countries, as originally proposed by the South Asian Media Association (SAMA) in 1991-1999 (of which the writer of this paper was the founding chairman) and eventually under-taken by the Jang-Geo group in Pakistan and the Times of India group effective 1st January 2010. Based on the encouraging progress of the “Aman ki Aasha” project, it is vital to expand the concept to cover all principal language media, print and electronic, as also to suggest that content OUTSIDE the ambit of such special projects carried by the same media should also reflect the principles of improved knowledge about each other rather than reinforce entrenched stereotypes.
5. Devising, adopting and practising a **Code of Content Conduct** by which media will avoid using certain words and terms and styles of presentation which promote distrust, hate and tension and which

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demonize the other country. Without curbing the reporting of facts and freedom of editorial expression, the Code could aim to encourage portrayal of the other country in humanistic and balanced terms.

Such a Code could also encourage media to accurately report views of both sides regarding unresolved core issues such as Kashmir, Siachin, Sir Creek, water, etc.

6. Support for regular, direct inter-action between contributors of existing websites dealing with Pakistan-India issues through travel, conferences, etc
7. Encouragement to existing bilateral friendship websites operated by youth in both countries and the opening of new similar and other forms using new mobile media and seeking support from corporate sectors.
8. Facilitate free and regular exchange of hard copies of print media including books, newspapers, magazines.
9. Encourage/request/persuade leading media, print and electronic, internet-based, to devote regular space, time e.g. one page every 14 days, one hour every 7 days to coverage of the dramatic, exciting, progressive changes taking place in both countries in the development sphere in the midst of corruption, misgovernance and violence to enable one country to know more about the other and to learn from one another, wherever relevant.
10. Institution of Awards for media and for media persons that work to promote improved information flow, more accurate perceptions, greater friendship and peace.

Role of Pakistan-India Parliamentarians

Member of parliaments in both countries can help improve relations between the two countries:

1. By taking an active interest in internal Party meetings to call for support for improved relations and to enable media in both countries to conduct initiatives and programmes that will build peace and friendship.
2. By making an active contribution to public events and processes through speeches, comments, writings, etc. that call for peace-building and improved relations on the basis of equity and justice.
3. By ensuring active interest in Parliamentary Committees dealing with Information, Culture, Foreign Affairs, Interior, Defence and other relevant legislative forums to recommend review and improvement of laws, policies, regulations which have a bearing on relations with the other country e.g. change in the visa regime for media persons to enable convenient travel; permission for at least a few TV channels to be screened, on **a reciprocal basis** through cable TV operators / distribution systems of the other country.
4. By taking an articulated position during relevant agenda items in sessions of Parliament to focus attention of fellow legislators on specific measures of reform that will empower media to render a constructive role.
5. By adopting a rational, evidence-based, progressive and balanced approach to relations with the other country rather than an emotive, conventional approach trapped by the mis-perceptions and ghosts of the past.
6. By helping to form a Parliamentary Friendship Group focussed exclusively on improved relations with the other country.
7. By exploring and advocating fair, practical solutions to unresolved disputes and issues that have bedevilled relations in the past.

The Future

The present is already the future unfolding steadily each day.

Traditional mainstream media are no longer the monolithic, dominant, one-way processes of projecting information, opinion and entertainment.

The new media, especially mobile, hand-held devices are spurring the metamorphosis and transformation of mainstream media into new cross-media forms e.g. Internet, paper-less websites of daily newspapers, TV programmes on Youtube, etc.

Where previously there may have been coherence and clarity, there is now a new chaos of content and connectivity.

Due to the fact that hundreds of millions of people in South Asia, especially India and Pakistan remain illiterate or unable to benefit fully from the educative dimensions of media, new and old, scope for the growth of some traditional mainstream media remains significant. These include printed newspapers in indigenous languages. Where the circulation of printed newspapers in the western countries has declined in the past few years by about 20 per cent, the circulation of newspapers in India has grown by about 20 per cent in the same period.

Thus, while strategies and methods for improving relations between Pakistan and India must use the new media in imaginative and adventurist ways, serious attention needs to be continuously applied to the mainstream media.

If the progress achieved in the sphere of trade and economic co-operation during 2011-12 is sustained, it is vital that the momentum for the resolution of core issues also gain speed.

Media have a pivotal role in shaping a better future both within and between Pakistan and India.

APPENDIX

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Appendix A

A brief essay by way of background information and analysis : “The media factor in the Pakistan-India relationship” by this writer originally published in the *South Asia Survey* magazine, New Delhi, India, 1994, also published in the anthology : “*The Global City*” by this writer published by Royal Book Company, Karachi, 1998.

The fundamental changes in the media sector since the writing of the following essay are: the transformation of the electronic media landscape of Pakistan by the rapid expansion of private TV and radio channels since 2000 and in India as well by similar growth. The second major change is the far higher level of officially-permitted Indian cinema content in Pakistani theatres and on Pakistani TV screens.

Yet several aspects identified in the essay, in the opinion of the writer remain applicable even 18 years after it was written.

So, happy or unhappy reading, as the case may be!

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The Media Factor in the Pakistan-India Relationship

(by Javed Jabbar, 1994)

Media are diverse and heterogeneous. Variation applies to the very nature of each mass medium as also to variations in the proprietorship of the medium which can range from being privately owned by an individual or by a family and thus reflective of a personal viewpoint or be completely or partially owned by the State and therefore controlled by Government as in the case of radio and TV, thereby making media into "His Master's Voices".

One distinguishing feature of mass media in the area that constitutes the two countries of Pakistan and India is the historically progressive role of the Press. From serving as a general custodian of the public interest to becoming a spokesman of the freedom movement to subsequently campaigning vigorously for the survival and strengthening of democratic institutions, the Press in both the countries has well demonstrated that media can render a catalytic role in the advancement and development of nations.

Unlike the scope for expression that is available to the independent Press, the medium of radio in both countries has remained subject to the constraints of State ownership and government control. Yet radio has played a pioneering and unrivalled role, even greater than that of the Press because radio is not bound by the low levels of literacy which the Press is restricted to. For the first time in this region as elsewhere in the world, radio equalized the access of the rich as well as the poor to the same information. In this sense radio was the first mass medium to truly democratize human knowledge. Though its primacy has now been displaced by the visual glamour of TV, radio remains a powerful part of the communications process.

The cinema, initially in India and subsequently after 1947 in Pakistan fostered the values of humanism and fraternity, ideals with a special relevance in countries where communalism-which is one of the gifts bequeathed to us by colonialism - has lurked as a perennial danger. Despite the advent of video and TV in recent times, the cinema still draws millions of middle and low income groups to view its message of song and dance.

Media in Pakistan and India eloquently express the duality of the relationship between the two countries. The independent vernacular Press, with a few exceptions, and the Government-controlled electronic media of radio and TV accurately reflect the polarization of respective viewpoints on the core issues of Kashmir and nuclear power: they also transmit the hostility and mistrust that characterize the formal official attitude towards each other.

At the same time, in these very media, as for example, in the film and entertainment pages of newspapers or in the broadcast of film songs or through the use of extended media such as the playing of film songs on audio cassettes or the viewing on private TV sets of pirated feature films on video cassettes or the screening of TV plays, the people and the media momentarily-on a daily basis!- put tension on the back-burner and relish each other's popular arts and culture.

The media in our two countries divide as well as bind, separate as well as synthesize our individual personalities and perceptions. In 46 years of history media have helped reinforce both the nastiness as well as the nostalgia. On one level, they may be merely the mirrors of reality. On another level, they are the microscopes of reality: choosing only portions of the complex total relationship and focussing excessively concentrated attention on particular aspects, to the exclusion of other facets, thereby losing the vision of the larger picture.

There is an inherently distortive dimension in the nature of media: subjective, selective, sensational. In the Pakistan-India context, the distortion often appears now to be embedded in the fundamental conceptual stages of observation rather than as a part of the descriptive and reporting function of media.

If a self-conscious patriotism may be said to be the last refuge of the scoundrel then the scoundrels in Pakistan and India find that the place of refuge is already occupied by the media.

A minimal residual national chauvinism is an essential component of the contemporary working persona: without it, a media analyst is like a person adrift on the ocean of identity. When even prophets need passports, so do media practitioners.

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Media are full-blooded protagonists in the blood and the dust, the beauty and the lust of the paradoxical relationship of conflict and convergence that marks Pakistan and India. The media are not cool, detached observers, mechanically recording events and incidents.

In our context, the media are the weapons of war, not the purveyors of peace. If the two countries have fought three military wars in 46 years, the media war has raged without a ceasefire for all these 46 years.

The extent and the intensity of the media war have varied only marginally. The basic thrust and momentum have been sustained, and often strengthened.

If individual media practitioners are unable to circumvent the motivations of their respective national identities is it fair or practical to expect media organizations to transcend their national contexts?

Significant contemporary examples of basic changes in conflict situations leading to partial or complete conflict resolution indicate that **media did not play** a critical leadership and determinant role in precipitating the vital initial breakthrough.

Whether it was the initiative taken by President Nixon to change relations with China, whether it was the inter-action between President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev, whether it was the accord between the Palestinians and Israel, the content and tone of mainstream media on both sides in all three cases retained the same elements of ideology and subjectivity right up to the moment of the breakthrough.

It was the imperatives of economic truth, the demands of political sagacity and statesmanship rising from within the depths of the stagnant status quo that welled up to the surface and became the irresistible forces of change, overwhelming the conventional paradigms propagated by the media.

The logjam was to a large extent kept static and fixed by the rigid stereotypes and the demonization projected by the media. A diffusion of tension was obstructed and not substantially facilitated by the media.

To say this is not detract from the subtle and sometimes even explicit civilizing and softening role that media played before these three breakthroughs became possible. While the news dimension of media may always retain the aggression and tension that characterize positions and polarity in political relationships, the analytical and contemplative portions of media that may receive less reader-ship attention on a daily basis but which have a steady, cumulative effect of their own, certainly contribute to making possible an ambience, to outlining an aura in which radical change in a status quo becomes possible.

In the three instances cited earlier, this preparatory facilitative role was played by international media rather than by the media rooted within the restraints of one country's context. An attitudinal shift became possible through the emergence of a global media consensus, comprising newspapers and magazines that had multi-country editions, by the formation of a preference for global peace that began to crystallize after Vietnam, by a planetary unanimity that a nuclear holocaust was an insanity to be avoided at all costs. There was a cultural change that took place in which media were one of the determinant factors.

True to their insatiable appetite for events and incidents rather than themes, media played a positive and precipitative role on a political level in helping dismantle the Berlin Wall in 1988 and in helping defeat the anti-Gorbachev coup in 1991 only when the basic upheaval had already begun.

Despite the posting of correspondents of some newspapers and agencies in each other's countries, the weekly or periodic publications of analyses by Pakistani commentators in Indian journals, and vice-versa, there has been only token improvement in awareness and appreciation of the other's viewpoint. The manner in which certain news is selected for prominent display and projection, the manner in which it is written and presented preoccupies perceptions and sets the tone. Satellite TV becomes a symbol both for reinforcing the status quo as much as for new opportunities.

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India launches and operates its own domestic satellite system but does not consider sharing this facility with Pakistan. For its part, Pakistan would view usage of an Indian satellite as becoming dependent for communications upon an unfriendly and unpredictable neighbour. That is, if at all the two countries could agree to jointly using an Indian satellite on which respective political positions could be projected without interference by the other side.

We presently have the curious spectacle of a non-South Asian regional satellite source such as the Asiasat satellite owned by a Hong Kong consortium enabling a private sector Indian TV channel known as Zee TV to be beamed across South Asia including Pakistan while Pakistan uses the same satellite to beam PTV Channel-2 across the region including India. The fact that many cable operators in India "black out" PTV Channel- 2 from the choice of Asiasat channels offered to subscribers shows how little things have changed despite the advent of satellite TV.

While Zee TV on rare occasions projects a certain candour on bilateral issues and themes that official media do not, the equation between the two i.e. Indian-based TV and Pakistan-based audiences The sheer size of the Indian economy in comparison to the Pakistan economy means that both through Zee TV as well as through advertisements for Indian products beamed on Star TV, BBC TV, MTV and Prime Sports, there is greater information flow from India into Pakistan than an equitable flow because so far there has been a negligible presence of Pakistani brands promoted on the Asiasat system.

Perhaps an apt contrast in volume as well as in advertising information content is the fact of Pakistani viewers looking at TV spots promoting different brands of Indian whiskey: in an age in which the advertising of hard liquor is banned even in North America and Europe.

About the only non-abrasive and non-offensive communications connection that is sustained through the media is the shared treasury of songs from the cinema enriched between the 1930s and the 1960s which remains a remarkable reservoir of romance and dreams, of memories and hopes.

In recent months, on different occasions, a consensus has been expressed on certain steps that could be taken to enable media and media practitioners to make a tangible contribution for the improvement of relations between Pakistan and India.

1. The initiation of a regular dialogue at the media leadership level i.e. editors, chief executives of radio and television corporations, publishers, film producers and directors. Presently, such dialogue is either totally non-existent or when it does occur such dialogue is unstructured, random and sporadic. There is a need to institutionalize dialogue between the media leaders in both countries. For example, the Councils of Newspaper Editors of both countries should meet through delegations at least once a year.
2. Visa requirements for media leaders should preferably be removed or significantly facilitated.
3. Correspondents of newspapers from one country should be posted for a period of six months or a year to work in a newspaper of the other country in order to better observe and understand the internal mind-set of the other country's newspaper and of the country's people and through such interaction develop a higher level of empathy.
4. Increase the frequency with which radio and TV broadcast programmes produced in the other country. Presently, such reciprocal public broadcast of programmes is restricted to the SAARC based SAVE system whereby one programme per month from one SAARC country is transmitted by the electronic media. This makes the frequency of a programme on India being transmitted in Pakistan very low i.e. once in six months. Such a frequency on a reciprocal basis should be increased to at least once a month as a starting point. For example, a "Pakistan Magazine" programme featuring some good news for a change could be shown on Indian TV for 30/50 minutes at least once a month, and vice versa.
5. The publication, initially on a quarterly basis, of a journal that studies the content, themes and direction of media in both countries.
6. Strengthening forums such as the South Asian Media Association.



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