

# bridging the divides

improving relations between india and pakistan  
~ a handbook on good journalism practice



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### Bridging the Divides:

#### Improving Relations between India and Pakistan: A Handbook on Good Journalism Practice

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### Introduction

The blasts on the Samjhauta Express on the night of February 18 had the potential to derail the fragile peace process between India and Pakistan. Yet, the official reactions were in the main mature, and media coverage responsible. Private news channels urged viewers not to allow terrorists to derail Indo-Pak friendship efforts. After almost 60 years of conflict between the two countries, the prospect of peace is alluring, and the role of the media in this process is vital.

Experience has taught us that in times of stress, it is critical for the public to have access to the truth and to information that enables them to understand and participate in the decisions affecting them. Journalists have seen first hand how reporting everyday issues in a context where neighbouring countries are in conflict can either inflame or ease tensions. Conflict — whether low intensity rumblings across the border or full scale war — raises tempers and builds barriers to understanding. Humanitarian crises become more acute, like the earthquake that devastated large parts of Kashmir in 2005 when politically

disputed boundaries became a schism that kept distraught families apart.

It is the journalists' job to reveal the real issues, to help people understand each other's differences — cultural, religious, political and otherwise. This does not mean concealing issues to paper over divisions. It means reporting with an understanding of their complexity. It means looking beyond and behind the surface for the deeper, fuller story. It means looking for new sources, new ideas and new opportunities to build tolerance.

Through providing an understanding of conflict, its impact on ordinary people, and by exploring possible solutions, there is a better chance of ending tensions. So what does this mean in practice?

**Professionalism.** The first and most important thing we can do is, simply, our job — professionally, accurately and ethically. We have to get the basics right.

**Responsibility.** Second, we need to recognize that the free exercise of our craft — exercising our rights and our responsibilities — is critical to maintain a free society in a time of conflict. We exercise these rights on behalf of the communities we serve, and we have an overriding responsibility to report fairly, accurately and honestly.

**Solidarity.** The third is to build solidarity and support among journalists. Solidarity does not mean that all of us must agree politically, or that journalists in different countries, or from different groups, on different papers or rival channels, cannot be in competition. Solidarity is based on a shared understanding of the importance of our craft, a commitment to good will and a recognition that we can disagree on issues without being enemies — that freedom of speech means the right to disagree.

On the most basic level, journalists need to support each other to do their job in safety and to agree, entrench and uphold an ethical code of conduct. Professional journalists, operating to a code of conduct should be ‘non-combatants’ even in a factional struggle.

### The IFJ Experience

Journalists have a strong tradition of discussing and debating their role and responsibility in times of conflict, through national unions and organizations, and internationally, through the IFJ. In India and Pakistan, the IFJ has been working with journalists as they confront the challenges of journalism in peace and conflict. It has stood by journalists when, in the name of tackling terrorism, governments have continued the crack down on democratic rights and press freedom.

In the past year, this has involved an intensive programme of research among journalists and editors and building a network of conflict-sensitive journalists and journalism trainers. It has meant developing training

resources and hosting roundtables, meetings and training workshops with journalists and editors around the country. The dialogue, debate and experience of about 200 journalists that have informed this and earlier programmes in the sub-continent form the foundation of this report.

This Handbook reflects the experiences of those who have participated in the research and forums, organized jointly by the IFJ and the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists and the All India Newspaper Employees Federation.

This experience and the resources from the IFJ global programme have been invaluable in understanding the challenges and best practices for journalists working in conflict situations.

This Handbook is a useful resource to promote conflict sensitive journalism, which in turn promotes peace building and conflict prevention, thus bridging the divides between the peoples of Pakistan and India.

*Jacqueline Park*

*Director, IFJ Asia-Pacific*





## CHECKLISTS FOR JOURNALISTS

### **Accuracy Checklist:**

- *Distinguish between first- and second-hand sources.*
- *Always use reputable sources, and wherever possible use first-hand information.*
- *Cultivate an extensive network of sources that can be called upon to give expert first-hand information on issues or events, particularly in other religious/language groups.*
- *When reporting crime, try to get the suspects' side as well.*
- *Ensure names of people and places are spelt accurately.*
- *Take steps to correct any errors that have been made.*
- *Avoid providing death tolls when verification is difficult.*

### **Balance Checklist:**

- *Avoid becoming a cheerleader for one side.*
- *Establish the different viewpoints and ensure they are presented respectfully and accurately.*
- *Bear in mind the context in which these views exist.*
- *Are some views held by an extreme majority?*
- *Rather than paraphrase other people's points of view, where possible, quote them directly.*
- *Ask yourself whether the story, as it is written, would harm or aggravate religious, racial or ethnic sensitivities.*
- *Be careful not to create a false balance — balance does not mean equal merit to all sides.*
- *Remember you are reporting for the whole community, not just your ethnic group.*

### **Context Checklist:**

- *Research the history of the conflict.*
- *Avoid focusing on individual acts of violence and try to paint the broader picture.*
- *Examine what each party has to lose or gain.*
- *Provide the perspective of the common people who are affected.*

### **Ethnicity Checklist:**

- *Avoid reference to a person's ethnicity, race or religion.*
- *If it is necessary to refer to a person's ethnicity, race or religion, confirm these details with the person to ensure accuracy.*
- *Where other news sources unnecessarily treat ethnicity as a cause, educate readers on the real causes and point out that ethnicity was not a factor.*
- *Understanding your own biases is vital and should be kept in mind when preparing or selecting news reports.*
- *Using images is a useful way of avoiding descriptions that might cause offence.*
- *Ask sources how they would like you to describe them — in terms of their race, religion and ethnicity, for example.*



## Meeting the Challenge in South Asia: Journalists Push the Boundaries

### Bharat Bhushan

Societies in transition pose both challenges and threats to the practice of journalism. South Asia is no exception to this. The entire South Asian region is in ferment today. Although the change is most dramatic in Nepal, where the change is palpable, it is not the only society that is in transition in South Asia.

The democracy deficit is evident in a greater or lesser degree in most countries of the region. There are conflicts rooted in competing nationalisms (for example, between India and Pakistan, and between India and Bangladesh). There are conflicts over sharing of resources (over the sharing of river waters and of ocean resources because maritime boundaries are not clearly defined) and over sharing of political power — as reflected in internal conflicts based on ethnic, regional and sub-regional groupings (there are estimated to be more than 80 insurgencies along

the Himalayan belt from Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh in the east). And there are conflicts over external borders between nations.

### Negotiating Contesting Terrains

Journalists in South Asia are caught in the contested terrain between the forces of status quo and the forces of change. Narrow nationalism tells you to stay within the territorial boundaries. The market tells you to globalize and transcend the territorial boundaries.

By our reportage we journalists also become mediators and facilitators in discourses of conflict within our own countries and across the neighbourhood. By our representation of events and conflicts we set the terms in which people think about these conflicts.

The vested interests of status quo, and the dominant elite and the State have immense power to seduce and to terrorize journalists to conform, to be partisans of stability and predictability in social and political processes and to become propagators of their ideology and their world view. They have the power to co-opt, to reward, to make you a partner in the benefits of status quo. At the same time, there are the forces of change that beckon, and as daily chroniclers of history, journalists cannot ignore them.

### Pushing Boundaries and Definitions

Under such circumstances what does it mean for journalists to push the boundaries? It means keeping the door open for negotiated compromises and peaceful settlements. It means depicting the problems of each party to a dispute with fairness, and representing each side as having genuine concerns.

Nation states in South Asia have tended to convert their external boundaries into instruments of defining their nationalism. The

boundary between nations as a site of contending nationhoods and identities is evident most starkly in the case of India and Pakistan and of India and Bangladesh. In both cases boundaries are sites of immense potential for conflict.

So strong is the idea of boundaries as water-tight divisions of identities that the surest way of making an enemy of a Pakistani is for an Indian to say that we are the same people divided by an artificially created border.

Cross-border migration, which is greater from Bangladesh to India than vice-versa, is used to demonize and criminalize the economic migrants.

How does the media negotiate these boundaries? To an extent we have witnessed a greater movement of journalists across national boundaries and reporting from the neighbourhood, whether it was the democracy movement in Nepal or the continuing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The mushrooming growth of TV channels and improved access, sometimes over the telephone, to key actors and analysts in each other's country has meant that relatively more balanced reporting is taking place than earlier. Journalists, despite restrictions, are travelling frequently across boundaries to report much more than they did earlier.

However, our mental boundaries and mental maps can still remain narrowly nationalistic. And often they do. More often than not, the interpretation of events across national boundaries is still within a framework of competitive nationalism (e.g., the Kashmir issue, the Sir Creek maritime boundary dispute, the Mahakali Treaty between India and Nepal, and the Ganga Water Treaty between India and Bangladesh).

And the net result is that the death of a feudal, exceptionally violent and essentially a tribal tyrant, Nawab Akbar Bugti, is unquestioningly described as a 'tragic loss' by journalists in India. Instead of mulling over why

the Baloch nationalist movement has to rely on a feudal and obscurantist leadership, it is just much easier to convert an enemy of the current Pakistani establishment into a hero after a briefing by the Foreign Office.

### Beyond Labels: Shades of Grey

Journalists can use neutral words while reporting on the water sharing or trade disputes between India and its neighbours instead of becoming unnecessarily jingoistic. They can help convert border resources into sites of co-operation rather than of contention and conflict.

It is because we unquestioningly accept the foreign policy and national security paradigms of our respective countries that a 'militant' agitating for a political cause becomes a 'terrorist', an economic migrant becomes a dangerous 'infiltrator' and an independent Tamil newspaper editor not toeing the line of the establishment becomes a 'Tiger agent'. And areas where there is a Maoist movement get to be described as 'Naxalite-infested' — an outbreak of a pestilence.

When journalists adopt and internalize the language of the State and the dominant elite, they tacitly also accept the assumptions underlying that language. With that comes an entire perspective that makes present day adversaries into permanent irreconcilable enemies.

When the Indian and the Pakistani media report on the contentious issues between them, they become extremely jingoistic. It is difficult to say where the propaganda of the respective Foreign Offices ends and journalism begins. However, one has to admit that by and large the Pakistani media is less prone to pushing the foreign policy line of the government than its Indian counterpart. The manner in which the Pakistani media held the establishment accountable for the Kargil debacle has no parallel across the border in India.

Journalists in South Asia with its multitude of religions, ethnicities and cultural diversity need to problematize these issues. This is particularly important at a time when technological progress has shortened the response time of journalists. The near-immediate coverage by a TV channel or radio about a riot, a bomb blast, or an ongoing dialogue over resources or borders, sets the ground for further perception and engagement with the issue (e.g., depiction of the conflict between the BSF and the BDR at the India-Bangladesh border, and description of the Mumbai serial train blast suspects as Muslims and not as terrorists).

When we ascribe motives in our attempt to quickly put an identifiable face on terrorism — whether it is Al Qaida, Lashkar-e-Tayyeba, Harkat-ul-Jehadi Islami (HUJI), Maoists, Naxalites or Tamil Tigers — we should ask ourselves, are we not accepting the language of our respective security establishments?

The paradigm shift that took place after 9/11 has changed our vocabulary. Often it suits those who control the levers of State power to accept such changes. Was the attempt to militarily deal with the Maoists in Nepal not projected by King Gyanendra as part of a global war on terrorism?

It is a major challenge for journalists in South Asia to be more guarded in their reportage, to use neutral words and political categories rather than a language that seeks to accuse, criminalize and exclude. If we don't do this, we will end up bolstering the biases and interests of our national security establishments.

Shades of grey are preferable to black and white when it is difficult to find clarity. By totalizing too quickly, by being definitive in our reporting rather than tentative, and by providing broad-brush descriptions which may have no basis in reality, are we not endangering the lives of innocent Muslims, Tamils or Kashmiris?

One must remember that journalism is rooted in the liberal tradition and stands for expanding freedom. The democracy deficit in our countries can be reduced by expanding democracy and by journalists reporting in a manner that strengthens democratic institutions and democratic movements. If we uncritically adopt the state's agenda — the agenda of the 'haves' — who will speak for the 'have-nots'? We should not be tempted to side with status quo on issues of social justice.

Journalists must cross the boundaries of national and state perspectives in all these conflict situations. One of my editors was fond of advising his reporters at loggerheads with the establishment, "Tell them that as a journalist you are neither from India nor from Pakistan. You come from Mars. And then report."

This is perfectly good advice in the South Asian context. And acting on it is the real challenge. In our journalism today the multiplicity of voices is lost. There is no openness of dialogue. That is the space — a space for a wide variety of views, for dialogue, for a gaggle of voices — that we as journalists have to reclaim and expand.

*The author is Editor (Delhi) of The Telegraph.*



## Laws and Lawlessness against Press in Kashmir

### Iftikhar Gilani

Journalists working in the strife-torn state of Jammu and Kashmir are still walking on the razor's edge. Torn between the guns of security forces, militants and renegades (pro-government militants), the press continues to remain a soft target. A small community of not more than 200 journalists (out of which 84 reporters are accredited with the Department of Information), a dozen have so far lost their lives since the onset of militancy in 1990. More worrying is that the community is suffering in isolation, with little consolation from either the national or international fraternity, barring a few occasions.

As more and more skeletons are tumbling out of the cupboards of the police, and other security agencies branding and killing innocent civilians in cold blood, perhaps the first enforced disappearance that came to light in 1989 was that of a journalist. Mohamamd Sidiq Sholuri, senior calligrapher with an Urdu fortnightly, *Takbeer*. He left for his office and never returned,

leaving his wife and daughters in an endless wait, reducing their life to penury.

While militants have issued threats, kidnapped journalists and even banned circulation in the past, the government has not lagged far behind. In 1990, the then governor, Jagmohan, ordered the arrest of a young journalist, Surinder Singh Oberoi and the closure of three newspapers. Their printing presses were sealed and cases were registered against them under the draconian Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA). Right now, two journalists are cooling their heels in prison. One of them is held under the Official Secrets Act (OSA) and is under detention since 2004, that too without trial. The eminent journalist, Shujaat Bukhari, was kidnapped in mid-2006 by unidentified gunmen, but luckily managed to escape.

Photo-journalist, Muhammad Maqbool Khokar (better known as Maqbool Sahil), is in the infamous Kotbalwal Jail in Jammu for the past three-and-half years without trial. Requests by the Jammu and Kashmir High Court and the National Human Rights Commission for his release have been ignored.

The High Court twice urged the authorities to drop charges against him, but in vain. Why this extreme case of abuse of human rights, where a person is kept in jail without facing court for a trial, has not evoked sympathy from the journalist community in Delhi and elsewhere remains a mystery.

Even when militants have been involved in the killing of journalists, the police have shown little spine in investigating the cases. Like the 1991 murder of the *Al-Safa* editor, Mohamamd Shaban Vakil, a long list of such killings and attacks remains a mystery. Sidiq Shoulouri was arrested and picked up by the CRPF in 1989 on his way to office. He simply disappeared. In 1992,

another calligrapher, Ghulam Mohammad Mahajan was dragged out of his residence in old Srinagar city and killed in cold blood, along with his younger brother, in full public gaze.

The thrashing by security forces and by militant groups is another feature of the harassment. Last year, the leader of a major political outfit summoned the editor of a Urdu daily and made him walk bare-foot in the market for publishing reports inimical to his political interests. At least two political outfits stormed the office of a respected weekly, *Chattan*, on similar grounds last year.

A decade ago, when the JKLF had split, the warring factions had warned the press of dire consequences if they carried reports of the rival group. In reaction, not knowing what to do, the Kashmir press stopped work for 11 days. A faction of the same outfit beat journalists who had been invited for a press conference at the Hazratbal complex. Their crime — they had

arrived late by about half-an-hour as they were attending the prayer ceremony of a deceased grandson of one of their colleagues.

A decade after this incident, Shujaat Bukhari, who had a narrow brush with death last year, says he feels the cold clutch of fear every time the phone rings late at night.

Bukhari recalls the trauma when he, along with a group of journalists, was taken hostage in south Kashmir by a pro-government militant outfit called Ikhwan. “I was among the five who were locked up in a room and the self-styled commander was issuing directions in our presence that he wanted the five lives to be converted into lifeless bodies by tomorrow,” he recalls. They were, however, released after a lot of backroom activity by their colleagues in Srinagar.

The professional journalist has to walk on the razor’s edge to keep the warring sides happy — an



### *A Sample of the Anti-Press Laws in Jammu and Kashmir*

*\*Section 8 of the Public Safety Act 1978 provides detention without trial of any person including a journalist for “acting in any manner prejudicial to security of state or maintenance of public order and maintenance of services and supplies essential to the community”. The scope of this Act is so wide that anything can come under this law.*

*\*Section 35 of J&K Customs Act 1901 empowers the government to ban circulation of newspapers and other journals and books without assigning any reason.*

*\*Jammu and Kashmir State Newspapers (incitement and offences) Act 1919, empowers the government to seize printing presses and publications on grounds of incitement to murder or to any offence under Explosive Substances Act. Section 6 of this Act stipulates that no order can be called in question in any court.*

*These two laws enacted almost a century ago have provided unlimited powers to the State to crush and stop newspapers without assigning any reason. They have been the most misused laws in the history of Jammu and Kashmir*

*\*Rule 34 of the Jammu and Kashmir Public Security Rules 1946 binds the reporter to disclose the source of information. Its violation demands three years’ imprisonment with fine.*

*\*Rule 35 of the same law provides five years’ imprisonment for contravention of order to public newspapers after pre-censorship.*

*\*Rule 36 provides three years’ imprisonment for contravening an order prohibiting performance of any drama containing any prejudicial report.*

*\*Rule 65 (b) prescribes three years’ imprisonment for contravention of an order requiring shopkeepers to keep open their shops and not to observe hartal (strike).*

*\*Section 10 of the Press and Publications Act 1932 empowers the government to seize printing presses used for printing newspapers containing “any words, signs or visible representation” which (a) incites commission of any cognizable offence, (b) directly or indirectly expresses, approves, or admires any such offence and (c) to bring into hatred or contempt the government established by law or to excite disaffection towards the government or make malicious attacks on the government or any of its ministers or misinterprets the policies and activities of the government.*

*\*Section 153 (a) of Ranbir Penal Code (RPC) prescribes seven years’ imprisonment for promoting hatred between different sections of the people on grounds of religion, place of birth etc. besides doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony.*

*\*Section 190 (a), 296 (a) and 505 of the RPC deals with statements conducive to cause fear or public alarm and prescribes three years’ imprisonment for writings aimed at fomenting communalism.*

impossible task. If an atrocity by the security forces is reported, he/she may be dubbed ‘anti-national’, whereas highlighting the misdeeds of militants or the extra-political activities of separatists could mean that he/she is against the (freedom) movement: a sword hanging over his/her head in both cases.

Masood Hussain, now special correspondent of *The Economic Times*, is a typical case of someone who has faced the wrath of both the pro-India renegade militants as well as militant outfits. A towering separatist leader, who was a writer himself, sent his goons to harass Hussain

in 1989, for writing against him. A few years later, Hizbul Mujahideen issued a death warrant against the scribe for exposing certain dealings of one of its commanders. Then, two years later, when renegade militia took over, they issued a death warrant against him for writing against their leader, Kuka Parrey. Thankfully, Masood is still alive.

In Kashmir, every scribe has a story to tell. Yusuf Jameel, a respected journalist who was working with the BBC and Reuters, had several narrow escapes. The parcel bomb that claimed Mushtaq’s life was meant for him. His office was

attacked with grenades. Threat was a permanent feature of his life. He was awarded an International Press Freedom award by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

In 2003, Ahmad Ali Fayaz, the Srinagar bureau chief of the *Daily Excelsior*, received a threatening phone call from a senior officer of the Border Security Force (BSF), who identified himself as Deputy Inspector General Desraj. The officer threatened to shoot Fayaz.

None of it has stopped as yet. Not completely. Two years ago, a young reporter survived an attack while sitting in his office. Bullets went through his nose but missed the nervous system. Doctors said that it was a miracle that he was now leading a normal life. The last victim, so far, has been Parvaz Sultan, editor of a local news agency, who was gunned down in his office apparently for reporting a feud between two factions of a militant group.

Two years ago, cable TV operators were asked by certain militant groups to stop operations for showing 'obscene' shows. Though they resumed operations after the intervention of a dominant militant group, Hizbul Mujahideen, the sword still hangs over them.

Jammu and Kashmir is perhaps the only state which, over the years, has liberally accommodated laws to gag the media, without facing a murmur of protest. Though the laws are not used frequently, their mere presence on the statute book sends a chill down the spine of a working journalist (see box on pg. 10).

The government also has other ways of muzzling the press. The Kashmir Valley does not have a vibrant private sector to support the media. Therefore, most of the newspapers owe their existence to official advertisements. Moreover, taking their cue from militants, who use both threats and the lure of money to get

newspapers to fall in line, the government and intelligence agencies have also got trapped in the same vice. A mushrooming growth of newspapers over the past few years is attributed to this lure. More than 100 newspapers and journals are published from Srinagar.

In a research paper, the editor of *Kashmir Observer*, Sajjad Haider, recently reported that the absence of a healthy media industry itself was a bigger challenge to media in Kashmir. "Just emerging from the throes of nearly two decades of conflict situation, the media has few accepted ethical standards," he wrote.

"In order to meet the rising costs, newspapers at times relied on various shadowy sources for sustenance. There are numerous instances where newspapers published paid advertisements from underground as well as over ground organizations considered as secessionists in nature by successive governments. Some of these organizations, once outlawed, are now engaged in negotiations with the Central government, but there are already several cases against half-a-dozen local newspapers in various police stations and courts for publishing their statements," he maintained.

Talk to any local journalist or newspaper owner about ethics and objectivity, they would attribute their association with some or the other camp to their survival and protection. With just a few shining exceptions who have remained steadfast, others have got trapped in camps.

*The author is Bureau Chief (Delhi) of The Kashmir Times and Special Correspondent (India) for Daily Times and The Friday Times (published from Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi).*



### Let Truth Be Told

**Maheen A. Rashdi**

War is a necessary evil and the ensuing casualties, simply collateral damage — or so we were told when Mr Bush declared war in Iraq. But war is also the geo-political ambitions of a few and of the price paid by many. What is war? When the choices left only include death or desolation as options for the future, it is war. When offering your own body as a weapon of destruction is the only recourse, it is war. And of course, when forces hungry for your oil resources start raining bombs in your land, it is definitely war.

With the role of the media being especially crucial in times of conflict, good journalism to understand the situation at hand and to help resolve the conflict is essential. And where there is conflict, there will definitely be sides to take. Reporting in such sensitive circumstances, has tested journalists' integrity and nerves on many reporting fronts. To strike a balance with professional integrity without succumbing to nationalism is the raging conflict within.

With conflict also come discriminatory issues; stereotyping and assumptions regarding race or religion. One example would be 'Islamic terrorists' instead of just terrorists. By creating prejudices through reportage, the right of the common reader/citizen to a 'free flow of ideas' is throttled at the very beginning.

With media having the power to shape public opinion, stereotypes have often been used as 'agents of war'. The nagging question is should we as journalists succumb to patriotism while reporting on conflict?

But before we shed biases, there still are many missing links to be capped in newspaper reporting — especially in South Asia — where levels need to rise as access to news is often denied because of inadequate infrastructure: conveyance, equipment, correct investigative techniques, etc., and hence, stories often fall short of good standard.

Pakistan being a developing nation and having suffered years of suppression because of the continuous political upheavals, publishers have become innately cautious in Pakistan, which puts restrictions on reporters.

Nevertheless, at present, Pakistan is perhaps enjoying a freedom which it has never had before as numerous electronic channels have opened up locally, which carry out many fearless investigative stories and which do not toe the government line. This kind of exposure was at one time unheard of in Pakistan where only the National News Network spoke on behalf of the government. But while a freer hand has been accorded to the media and reporting levels (especially in electronic media) have risen, the India-Pakistan (vis-à-vis Kashmir) conflict is still a sticky issue and biases mar reportage which gets influenced by misplaced patriotism. To fight against that, we must agree to declare war against war.

On a wider scale, the greatest threat that media reporting is facing is the force of

extremism threatening the world of free media, not just Pakistan. Fixed perceptions need to be broken out of and pre-determined judgements never be allowed to cloud the quality of reportage. Given the widespread panic unleashed after 9/11 in the garb of the fight against terrorism, a much more intricate conflict has arisen, which is extremism in its own sense.

In Pakistan particularly, we have to fight against a world which sees Muslims as the 'enemy'. From barbaric, fanatic, violent and militant to being inhuman, every negative implication is now freely being ascribed to Pakistani-born-Muslims by almost all western societies. The face of extremism that defiles truth by putting a colour to it is akin to a crime. Other 'neo-political' trends like that of 'embedded' reporters is also fast becoming an accepted deviation from the principles of good journalism and news reporting.

Spreading to our region, it has now become a norm that during press conferences held for sensitive issues, only 'certain reporters' are allowed questions which are pre-approved by the 'concerned authority'. This is adulteration of honest journalism. And this is a stigma all honest media persons have to fight against. We cannot allow any nation's policy to give freedom

of the press and the citizen's right to free information such a bizarre twist.

It is imperative that positive moves be adopted where professionals pledge support for objective journalism. In our region we all desperately need to incorporate values of freedom and peace for all and condemn violence of every kind.

After living through years of prejudices, the media and peace groups in Pakistan have become more or less used to hypocrisies practised by all kinds of governments — military or political. And though we have understood that misrepresentation is one of the prime functions of government intelligence, State violence still has the power to break the resilience of many media men and women who choose to toe the safer line, preferring to live and let live.

But if we are attempting to bridge divides, all forms of aggression against free speech must be throttled. The essential code adopted by us should include a strong correlation with the public's right of access to knowledge and information. And for this, the most urgent need is to establish voluntary codes of conduct which should rate objectivity as their first principle.

*The author is Features Editor, Dawn, Karachi*





## MANIFESTO FOR A DEMOCRATIC MEDIA CULTURE

*As adopted by journalists' unions from 60 countries at the 21st World Congress of the IFJ, Montreal, June 8-13, 1992.*

*The **International Federation of Journalists** looks to the future with confidence. We believe that professional journalists, organized in free and independent trade unions, play a key role in the creation and maintenance of a democratic media culture.*

*The **IFJ** believes that democracy depends upon the extension of freedom of expression and social justice worldwide.*

*The **IFJ** insists that democracy is fully respected when there is an understanding of the special and particular role of the media in democratic society.*

*The **IFJ** believes that the role of media in democratic society is to apply the principles of press freedom upon which the freedom of expression and opinion relies.*

*The **IFJ** considers that the treatment of news and information as a commodity must not override or interfere with the duty of journalists to inform their audience.*

*The **IFJ** defines press freedom as: "that freedom from restraint which is essential to enable journalists, editors and publishers to advance the public interest by publishing, broadcasting or circulating facts and opinions without which a democratic electorate cannot make responsible judgments."*

*The **IFJ** believes this freedom can only be achieved when there is recognition that:*

- 1. A free, independent media reflecting diversity of opinion is a pre-condition of democratic societies;*
- 2. The free flow of information is the lifeblood of communities whether they be based on geography, ethnic origins, shared values or common language;*
- 3. Freedom of expression and opinion can only exist where citizens' rights to freedom of information and the right to know are guaranteed;*
- 4. The professional integrity and independent role of journalism have to be respected to ensure a democratic and pluralistic press around the world;*
- 5. Information and cultural material of communities must not be threatened for political or economic reasons by technological developments.*

*The **IFJ** calls upon all governments to provide a legal framework which will ensure the freedom of information, freedom of access to sources of information, and the freedom to practise professional journalism without pressure from either political or economic interests.*

*The **IFJ** demands full and universal recognition of the right of freedom of association and of the right of journalists' unions to bargain collectively on behalf of their members.*

*The IFJ opposes the use of information media by governments, state authorities or proprietors for their own political, commercial or personal advantage.*

*The IFJ promotes and campaigns for the creation of material conditions for the development of freedom of expression and opinion.*

*The IFJ, therefore, reaffirms its support for the Declaration of Windhoek of May 3rd, 1993, which identifies fundamental principles for the establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press which is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation, and for economic development.*

*The IFJ supports the Charter of the United Nations and strengthened international co-operation based upon universal respect for trade union and human rights.*

*The IFJ seeks endorsement at local, regional, national and international levels of the IFJ Code of Principles on the Conduct of Journalism which forms the basis for universal standards of ethical conduct for the practice of professional journalism.*

*The IFJ believes media professionals, journalists and editors, and publishers, both in the written and audiovisual media, should engage in dialogue internally and with governmental and intergovernmental authorities on the question of media policy.*

*Such structures for dialogue should bring together legitimate representatives of the workforce, management and consumers to discuss:*

*1. The economic and social development of the media, and in particular, the need to limit monopolization which can threaten diversity of information sources necessary for the practice of democracy at all levels in society.*

*2. The problems of unemployment and job insecurity, whether caused by concentration of mass media ownership or otherwise.*

*3. The practical implementation of laws, policies and standards designed to assist in the development of a free and pluralistic media.*

*4. Professional, economic and social conditions within the media, including:*

- a) The development of openness and transparency in the business and social affairs of all media enterprises.*
- b) The maintenance of independent and recognized systems of professional training which reflect the need for high-quality journalism, independent and distinct from political and commercial imperatives.*
- c) Legal recognition of mechanisms for the defence of freedom of information and independent journalism, such as editorial statutes.*
- d) The creation of secure working conditions within media enterprises, based upon equality of opportunity and including limitations on exploitation of freelance and casual labour.*

*The IFJ calls upon the journalists the world over to unite under the principles and policies of the IFJ in the fight against censorship and political and economic oppression.*



## Attitudes and Experiences of Conflict Reporting among Journalists in India and Pakistan

### Report of a Survey

A survey amongst 135 journalists from India and Pakistan revealed a striking urge to know each other and understand each other's viewpoints. Journalists from both sides of the border admitted that although information from official sources is limited and biased, they have to depend on them due to lack of other options.

Identifying pre-conceived mindsets of reporters and lack of interaction as the root cause of the bias that gives a different colour to their reportage on India-Pakistan relations, journalists from both sides of the Line of Control (LOC) have argued that travel restrictions that bar media persons from visiting each other's country should be lifted. This can help them bridge the gaps between the people on both sides and thus contribute to the peace process which can eventually lead to conflict resolution.

Picking up power politics as the essence of the India-Pakistan relations and the Kashmir conflict, journalists from both countries have said that people-to-people contact and negotiated political settlement are the only ways of bringing about peace between the two neighbours. They suggest that the journalist community should focus on the human element in all conflicts and report in an accurate and unbiased manner, free of gate-keeping policies.

The survey, based on the responses of a total of 135 journalists — 85 from India and 50 from Pakistan — was conducted in mid-2006. The findings of the survey point to the need for professional training in conflict reporting, as well as the establishment of guidelines and codes of conduct for journalists.

### Coverage of India-Pakistan Issues

In terms of coverage of the India-Pakistan conflict, there are sharp variations as only 5% of the Indian regional language media carries 6 to 10 stories daily on the issue compared to 25% in the English media. In Pakistan, coverage is more consistent: 79% (English) and 70% (regional language) for 2 to 5 stories.

Coverage of the Kashmir issue has also received similar responses as the maximum number of stories filed by the respondents, both English and regional language, does not exceed 10 in a year. About 75% of the journalists from the Indian media filed/broadcast 1 to 5 stories on the Kashmir issue in the last 12 months. The figure is lower in the regional language press, that is, 67%. Only 25% journalists in the English and 34% in the regional language media have done 6 to 10 stories.

In the case of Pakistani journalists, about 34% from the English and 30% from the regional language media have done 1 to 5 stories on the subject. About 22% of the respondents from the

English and 19% from the regional language media have done more than 10 stories. About 13% of the English-media respondents and 7% from the regional language media have done 6 to 10 stories on the Kashmir issue.

Coverage of specific issues in India: border disputes and peace process, 95%; nuclear conflict, 94%; Kashmir conflict, 88%; sports, 82%; and cultural exchange and cinema, 80%.

In Pakistan, coverage of specific issues was: border dispute and Kashmir conflict, 70%; nuclear conflict, 67%; peace process, 52%; sports, 48%; and cultural exchange, 17%.

### Tone, Tenor and Balance

The perception of journalists interviewed is that the general tone of media coverage of Pakistan-India relations in the Indian media is not inflammatory or sensational. Interestingly, a whopping 75% in the English media and 91% in the regional language media in India feel that the language used in reports on the Kashmir conflict is analytical. However, there seems to be a difference of perception across the border:

While 84% respondents in India feel that the media is neutral in its coverage of border disputes, the Kashmir conflict and the nuclear conflict, the corresponding number in Pakistan is only 40%. Only 13% of the respondents in India said that coverage of border disputes is sensational and gets a biased coverage, while the corresponding number in Pakistan is more than double, that is, 27%.

While 10% Indian respondents feel Kashmir and the nuclear conflict are sensationalized, the corresponding number in Pakistan is 30%.

However, journalists from both sides of the border are of the same view that the media generally does not report both sides of the story related to Indo-Pak relations. In India 84% journalists and in Pakistan 74% journalists have

expressed the same opinion. Significantly, 79% respondents in India and 75% in Pakistan feel that the language used in reports on the Kashmir conflict is emotional. Jingoistic strains and sensationalism have also been noticed by 43% journalists in India and 60% in Pakistan.

### Sources: Official and Limited

It is interesting to note that the majority of journalists interviewed have to depend on government sources even though they feel that information from such sources is limited and biased. Insofar as the respondents from the English media are concerned, 38% have identified the police as the most commonly used source. Next come military sources, followed by the Information Department, websites and then politicians. The least often used sources include armed militant groups as only 3% have voted in favour of that option.

In the Indian regional language media, equal weightage is given to news from politicians and the police and military sources (23% in each case). The Information Department scored third with 16% respondents opting for it. About 12% respondents use NGOs as a source of information and 7% feel that websites are good sources for their stories.

About 53% of the respondents in India and 46% in Pakistan feel that the information received from the State institutions is limited, biased and not useful. Majority of the journalists depend on government sources though they recognize that such information is limited and biased. Even though 67% journalists seek to use sources from every side, 78% of the regional language media in India and 70% in Pakistan feel that such sources are not reliable and accurate. In India, the majority feel that language or nationality are not barriers to using sources from all sides. But in Pakistan, 52% (English) and 48% (regional

language) journalists feel that nationality is the main barrier.

### Censorship

Apart from lack of reliable and accurate sources, non-availability of proper training and education materials, different forms of censorship also affect accurate and impartial reporting. The picture that emerges is as follows:

In India, censorship was attributed to the government by 33% of the respondents, while the corresponding number in Pakistan was 45%. Self-censorship, disturbingly, was identified as a concern by 33% of the respondents.

### A Skewed Picture

In view of the biased and limited sources of information and lack of understanding, it is quite expected that the areas where minority groups most regularly receive media coverage are war, terrorism and crime. Terrorism has topped the chart with 50% respondents in the English and 71% in the regional language media in India identifying it as the most commonly used area. The least regularly used area is culture and cinema.

In Pakistan, the most often used area is crime (English — 39%, regional language — 40%), culture/cinema (English — 33%, regional language — 30%), sports (English — 22%, regional language — 22%). Least often used area is war (English — 39%, regional language — 45%).

In India, a large number of respondents in India (61%) have said stereotypes are not used to cover incidents/issues related to other religious groups or the other country. In contrast, in Pakistan, 55% have said that stereotypes are used. For instance, 'Indian-occupied Kashmir' is used for J&K whereas Pakistan-held Kashmir is referred to as 'Azad Kashmir'.

### Surmounting the Roadblocks

The barrier, in the opinion of most of the journalists surveyed, is lack of proper training and reporting guidelines and also not understanding the other side. About 38% of the respondents from the English media and 23% of the regional language media in India have sought examples of best practices to improve their understanding and reporting on religious conflict and war.

In terms of proactive steps to improve reporting, training has scored the highest point as 62% (English) and 70% (regional language) journalists have said that it would be most helpful to improve their understanding and reporting on religious conflict and war.

Journalists also pointed to the lack of existing codes of ethics and guidelines on reporting conflict. However, all of them have said that if available, they would like to use such material.

As many as 85% journalists said they were not aware of any code of ethics in their media institution. Encouragingly, 96% respondents said they would use the code of ethics if proper training is given to them.

### The Way Forward

There appears to be a largely held opinion that the media has not undertaken adequate steps to provide accurate, balanced and fair information on the ongoing conflict between the two countries. As many as 79% of the respondents from India and 93% from Pakistan have said that the media is generally biased towards its own country.

Identifying the strongest reason for nationalist bias in the media, about 30% (English) and 44% (regional language) respondents in India and 67% (English) and 42% (regional language) respondents in Pakistan, have picked 'patriotism'.

Journalists from both sides of the border are confident that they could influence a change in media culture, though there are differences of opinion on how they could go about it.

About 58% of the respondents have said that the most effective way of making the media contribute to resolving the conflict is to have guidelines and checklists on conflict reporting. Next in order of preference comes the option of

making code of ethics a day-to-day practice. As far as a way forward is concerned, about 63% journalists in India and 67% of their colleagues in Pakistan have advocated in favour of negotiated political settlement. People-to-people dialogue has seemed to be more effective for 38% Indian and 33% Pakistani journalists.

*The survey was conducted in India and Pakistan by the IFJ, AINEF and PFUJ.*





## GUIDELINES FOR GOOD CONFLICT REPORTING

### **1. Duty to understand conflict:**

- We have an obligation to study and understand conflict and conflict resolution generally before reporting on it.
- We should understand how conflicts develop and how resolutions can emerge; we should know about the 'rules of war' as well as something about peace studies and the evolution of resolutions.
- This is the same with any specialized or 'beat' reporting.
- We would never report on medical issues, for example, without trying to understand and reading up on the science and technology of it at least a little.
- Why should conflict and conflict resolution be any different?

### **2. Duty to report fairly:**

- We have an obligation to report on the conflict fairly and in a balanced way.
- We must make every effort to report the complexities and opinions of all factions and sub-factions in a conflict.
- We should always make our own allegiances clear. As journalists, we must let the reader know where we stand if we are on any one side.
- Again, this is true of any type of reporting journalists do.

### **3. Duty to report background and causes of conflicts:**

- We should accurately represent both the legitimate and perceived grievances of all parties.

· We must remember, and remind our readers, that even perceived grievances are important to perpetuating and resolving conflicts.

### **4. Duty to present the human side:**

- We have an obligation to represent their trauma and the human stories of all the conflict's victims in a balanced, professional and non-exploitative manner.
- This is an obligation we have not only to those people we are reporting on but also to our readers.

### **5. Duty to report on peace efforts:**

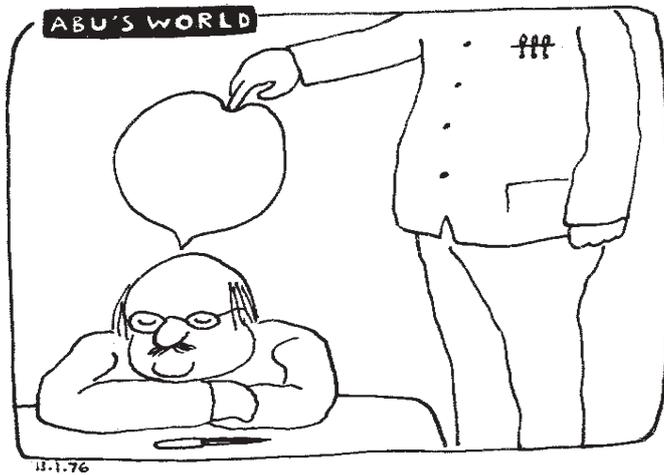
- We should report on the efforts of those working on peace and reconciliation every bit as much as those who exacerbate the conflict.
- We should actively seek out sources outside the primary belligerents, especially those who break from simplistic, bipolar interpretation of events. This expands our understanding and our readers' understanding of the conflict.
- This does not mean taking sides or 'propagandizing for peace'; it simply means reporting on peace efforts as well as war efforts.

### **6. Duty to recognize our influence:**

- We should always be aware that our reporting will affect the conflict and the lives of people in it.

We should be ever vigilant to avoid being used by one side or the other in their war efforts and to expose those attempts at media manipulation if so found.

*(Drawn from Institute for War and Peace Reporting training module)*



## What's in a Name: Language Issues in Reporting Conflict

**Laxmi Murthy**

With due apologies to Shakespeare, journalists will admit that a garlic pod might not smell as sweet if called a rose! The journalist is not outside society; bias and opinion are not exceptional aberrations but inherent in the media's functioning.

Media thus has the capacity to reinforce ethnic, communal, sectarian and jingoistic politics. Newspapers, radio, television and the Internet play a significant role in societies torn by conflict, where mass media is the primary vehicle of the right to freedom of expression. The mass media mediates the public sphere(s) and plays a vital role in shaping as well as reporting public discourse.

This role can be a positive, informative role, building understanding among communities, or media can also be part of the problem, exacerbating/fuelling conflicts.

For instance, emotive language used out of context has the effect of whipping up passions where more rational and balanced reactions might be more socially meaningful. Journalists must sparingly use words like 'devastated', 'terrorized' or 'atrocities'.

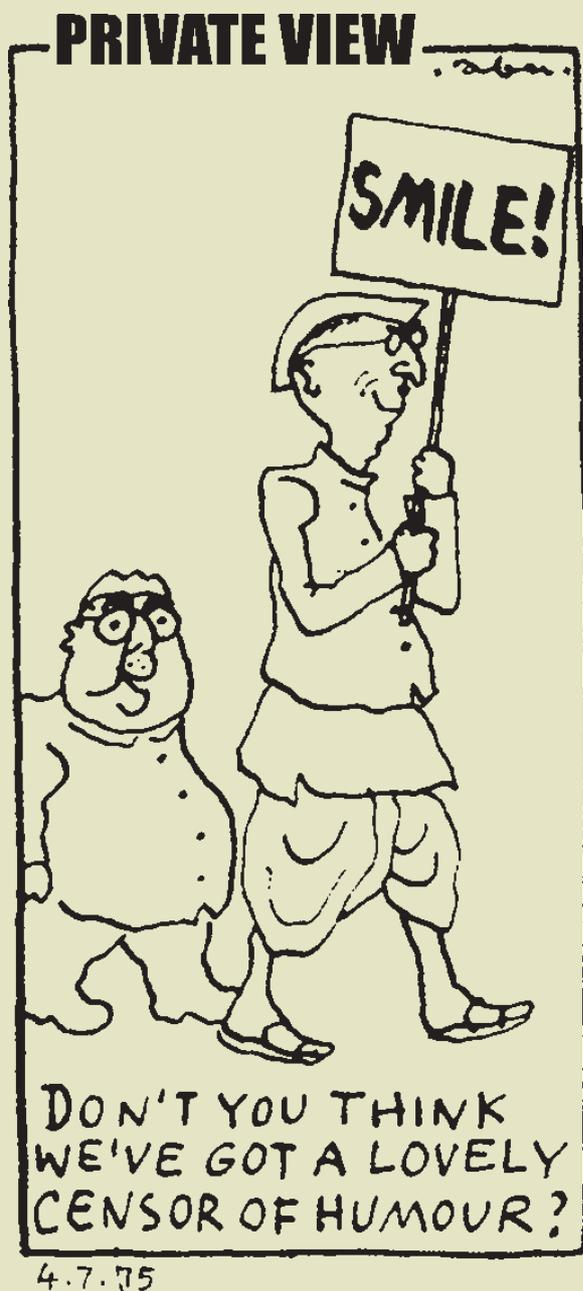
Precise and appropriate use of terms can prevent needless fanning of fires: assassination is the murder of a head of state while massacre is the deliberate killing of innocent, unarmed civilians. Soldiers and police personnel are not massacred. Genocide means killing an entire people and must not be used loosely. The media must not minimize suffering, but strong language must be used carefully, in order to avoid sensationalism.

Responsible journalism requires sensitivity to the politics of naming. Nomenclature reflects the perspective of those doing the labelling. Media is often responsible for perpetuating divisions and also creating new ones. Dichotomies like 'insider-outsider' contribute to a discourse that discourages any discussion of grey areas and complexities.

Media usually follows an official line prohibiting the advocacy of secessionism. This status quoist approach is also related to ethnic bias as well as statist bias, and a majority over minority view. The dichotomy exists in every conflict zone in South Asia: branding of the *jehadi* or freedom fighter or Maoist as 'terrorist' or 'extremist'.

Yet, we must remember that one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter. Agencies like Reuters have issued a guideline to avoid using the word 'terrorist' and instead use words like 'rebel', 'militant' or use the word people describe themselves with, e.g., *mujahideen* or 'people's warriors'.

Similarly, there is little effort on the part of the media to distinguish the immigrant from the 'infiltrator'. This is particularly damaging in the South Asian context. Open and porous borders,



coupled with economic disparities between nations, means that there is large-scale and regular movement across borders, much of it for economic, rather than security concerns.

Nomenclature used for migrants is too often determined by religious identity. A Muslim immigrant from Bangladesh to India is easily (and most often falsely) labelled 'infiltrator' or 'intruder', while a Hindu immigrant from Bangladesh is bestowed the label of 'refugee'. Patriotism, religious and communal identity of journalists affect the perception of who is crossing borders for what reason.

One way the State fights semi-State/parallel internal governments is to criminalize them by labelling collecting of resources as 'extortion'. Political endorsement can change the situation from 'extortion' to 'tax' — for instance, when the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) movement got 98 per cent of the vote and established the government in 1993 after a 30-year freedom struggle, the 'extortion' became 'tax'. Similarly, the Sepoy 'Mutiny' of 1857 in India is now being reclaimed as the 'First War of Independence' against British colonial rule.

Journalists must be aware of the impact of the media and the role of the journalist, and ever conscious of the democratic space for a journalism of value and dissent. The social responsibility of the media and media practitioners must be encouraged. For, good journalism is conflict sensitive journalism that recognizes the power of the word.

*The author is Program Manager with the International Federation of Journalists, Asia-Pacific.*



## Case Study: Pitfalls of Prejudice

### Trial by Media

#### Iftikhar Gilani

Media can be both—architect and demolition squad. I was made the subject matter of the great deconstruction as well as reconstruction. The story of my unjustified detention under the Official Secrets Act (for possessing a ‘classified’ document) is well known. Lesser known is the role of the media in reporting my case.

I learnt about the so-called incriminating document and my arrest through TV channels. On June 9, 2002, when intelligence agencies were raiding my apartment, they had locked me and my wife in our bedroom at around 2 p.m. Later at 7 p.m., after we were allowed to sit in the lobby, one raiding party member switched on our TV. Various news channels were reporting the raid on my house.

The Aaj Tak correspondent, Deepak Chaurasia, stood outside my building (nobody was allowed inside my flat because it had been sealed off) and reported ‘live’ that I was absconding. For Zee News, my wife was absconding. For Doordarshan, I was being questioned. In between, Aaj Tak flashed that some sensitive defence document was found in my laptop computer, although I have never owned a laptop in my life! (Later, however, Deepak Chaurasia also supported the campaign for my release.)

Once early morning in jail, while being herded to attend court, Assistant Superintendent Jitendra Kumar signalled me out from the rows of prisoners and told a subordinate that there were orders to take me to the court in chains. Insistence and protest are alien words in a prison. I was sent to the jail control room to get fettered. In the meantime, a deputy superintendent arrived and I gathered courage to ask his help. He called for the court orders, but there were none. When he demanded an explanation, the concerned assistant superintendent pleaded that he had read in the Hindi daily *Amar Ujala* that this man should be sent to court in fetters.

Mother of all mischievous reports against me was that of Neeta Sharma, a crime reporter of *The Hindustan Times* (HT), now with the NDTV, who reported that I had “admitted to having ISI links”. The report said, “Iftikhar Gilani, 35-year-old son-in-law of Hurriyat hardliner Syed Ali Shah Geelani, is believed to have admitted in a city court that he was an agent of Pakistan’s spy agency.” The report appeared in the paper on June 11, a day after I was produced in the court for the first time.

In the competition of bylines and exclusives, she set aside professional standards and did not cross-check even with her own court reporter. The report even fabricated quotes from me. One

such fancy quote was: “My father-in-law was impressed by my motivation and dedication to the cause of *jihad* and this is the reason he married his daughter to me.” Quoting officials who interrogated me, she reported that I had confessed to having known many ISI agents, with whom I had been in regular touch. At that time, I had not even been interrogated either by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) or by the police. This irresponsible report was misused by the IB to confuse the journalist fraternity so that they might not protest their patently illegal designs.

All Delhi newspapers, including the HT, usually reach Srinagar (Kashmir) in the afternoon. However, on June 11, 2002, the HT was rushed to Srinagar in the wee hours and circulated among key journalists who were spearheading the campaign for my release and fair investigation. Sharma’s report was a dampener for those believing in my innocence.

Perturbed at this report, my wife Aanisa contacted Shobhna Bharatiya, Deputy Chairperson of the HT. Thanks to my friends in the HT and Ms Bharatiya, the paper corrected itself. But there were many who had read the first report and not the denial, and hence, the needle of suspicion continued to hang over me for months.

The Hindi daily, *Hindustan*, headlined on June 10, 2002, “*Geelani ke damaad ke ghar ayakar chhapon mein behisab sampatti wa samwaidansheel dastaweiz baramad*” (Huge property and sensitive documents recovered from the house of Geelani’s son-in-law during income tax raids). The report gave publicity to many unsubstantiated statements.

On June 12, another report in the same daily claimed that I was in constant touch with international Islamic terrorist organizations. The newspaper had attributed many false statements to people in my neighbourhood, such as, the *dhobi* (washerman) in

our locality telling the reporter that I used to only send my children to give him clothes and never interacted with him directly and always remained aloof from the society. The story also went on to say that I used to work in my study till late! A suspicious activity for a journalist!

When my friends approached Mrinal Pande, the editor of *Hindustan*, for a clarification, she said that she had tons of information against me. However, she stopped the publication of such imaginative stories.

Based entirely on his imagination, Pramod Kumar Singh wrote in *The Pioneer*, “Iftikhar Ali Geelani, the son-in-law of jailed Hurriyat leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani, was the Delhi-based point man of Mohammad Yusuf alias Syed Salahuddin, the Pakistan-based commander-in-chief of the terrorist outfit Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HuM).”

On June 11, 2002, the Hindi daily *Rashtriya Sahara* published a photo of my wife coming out of the Special Cell after meeting me. The absurd headline of the story, while informing its readers about my arrest, read, “*Iftikhar giriftar, biwi Aanisa farar*” (Iftikhar arrested, wife Aanisa absconding.)

Even a respectable news magazine like *Frontline* and its respectable reporter Praveen Swami were duped into believing that I was the resident editor of two Pakistani newspapers, *The Nation* and *The Friday Times*. A bit of thought would have made the matter clear. Is it possible to be a resident editor of a Pakistani publication in India? Besides, how can any person work for two rival publications that are being published from one place, i.e., Lahore?

*Dainik Jagran*, a popular paper inside Tihar jail, sensationalized and reported like a police newspaper. I dreaded the mornings when, after classes, newspapers were distributed in the wards. My torture on the day of admission in jail is largely owed to the misreporting by the

newspapers. When I tried to plead my innocence, they would say, “Is *Dainik Jagran* wrong?” They would never believe that a printed word could be the fanciful imagination of a reporter. For them it was a gospel truth.

I do appreciate that crime reporters have their own constraints. It is not possible to get the version of an accused in police custody. So the source of *masala* (spice) is only the police. But we need to inculcate a culture where access to these unfortunate souls is demanded from the police if the police wants its version to be published. The police should be told in plain words that one-sided boast of their adventures shall not be taken without a pinch of salt.

One obstacle is the interests of some reporters who keep the police in good humour for the sake of getting ‘exclusives’ and ‘leaks’. In these circumstances, editorial departments of newspapers need to take a stand. Some newspapers, like *The Times of India*, have taken a lead in this respect. They have stopped publication of any ‘leak’ without getting the version of the other side. The initiative needs to be broadened and adopted by other media establishments.

This is crucial as editorial departments are also responsible for degeneration of crime reporting. Cub reporters are assigned this important beat and then subjected to the pressure of finding ‘exclusives’, making them vulnerable to being swayed by the police who lure them with the promise of providing bylines. It has now become a symbiotic relationship. Police and intelligence agencies feed them cock-and-bull stories, and in turn, these vested agencies use them to meet their own ends. In the process innocents suffer in public, in jail and in the judicial proceedings.

Nobody cares for them. There are no spicy stories to tell.

*In June 2002, Iftikhar Gilani was arrested under the Official Secrets Act (OSA) for possessing a paper published by the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, detailing among other things, the deployment of Indian troops in Indian-administered Kashmir. The document was anything but classified: it was available on the Internet. He was detained in Tihar jail till January 2003, when the government withdrew the case against him. ‘My Days in Prison’, Gilani’s scathing account of the failure of law enforcement agencies to uphold democracy, was published by Penguin in 2005.*





## IFJ INTERNATIONAL CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE SAFE CONDUCT OF JOURNALISM

*The dangers posed to journalists and media staff working in dangerous situations and conflict zones are the subject of extensive record. The IFJ has recorded the deaths of more than 1,000 journalists and media staff over the past ten years. Many journalists are killed, injured or harassed in war zones, either targeted by one side or another or caught in the crossfire of violence. Others are the victims of premeditated assault and intimidation by criminals and terrorists or by agencies of the state — the police, the military or the security forces — acting secretly and illegally.*

*Very often, there is little that journalists or media organizations can do to avoid casualties. There will, inevitably, be accidents, no matter how much care is taken to provide protection. Unfortunately, there is little one can do when those targeting the media use ruthless and brutal methods to crush journalistic inquiry. However, there are steps that journalists and media organizations should take to minimize the risks to staff. In particular, the following are vital considerations in providing protection:*

***Adequate preparation, training and social protection.*** *It is essential that journalists and media staff be in a state of readiness when difficulties arise. There should be a framework for providing individuals with health care and social protection.*

***Media professionals must be informed and inform themselves*** *about the political, physical and social terrain in which they are working. They must not contribute to the uncertainty and insecurity of their conditions through ignorance or reckless behaviour.*

***Media organizations must guard against risk-taking for commercial advantage*** *and should promote co-operation among journalists whenever conditions exist that are potentially hazardous.*

***Governments must remove obstacles to journalism.*** *They must not restrict unnecessarily the freedom of movement of journalists or compromise the right of news media to gather, produce and disseminate information in secure and safe conditions.*

***People must keep their hands off the media.*** *Everyone should respect the physical integrity of journalists and media staff at work. Physical interference with filming or other journalistic work must be prohibited.*

*With these considerations in mind, the IFJ calls on journalists' groups, media organizations and all relevant public authorities to respect the following:*

*1. Journalists and other media staff shall be properly equipped for all assignments, including the provision of first-aid materials, communication tools, adequate transport facilities and, where necessary, protective clothing.*

*2. Media organizations and, where appropriate, state authorities shall provide risk-awareness training for those journalists and media workers who are likely to be involved in assignments where dangerous conditions prevail or may be reasonably expected.*

*3. Public authorities shall inform their personnel of the need to respect the rights of journalists and shall instruct them to respect the physical integrity of journalists and media staff while at work.*

*4. Media organizations shall provide social protection for all staff engaged in journalistic activity outside the normal place of work, including life insurance.*

*5. Media organizations shall provide, free of charge, medical treatment and health care, including costs of recuperation and convalescence, for journalists and media workers who are the victims of injury or illness as a result of their work outside the normal place of work.*

*6. Media organizations shall protect freelance or part-time employees. They must receive, on an equal basis, the same social protection and access to training and equipment as that made available to fully employed staff.*



## Kashmir: Victim of Media Stereotyping

**Riyaz Masroor**

The Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh was more than candid last spring when he spoke during a media event to announce the Ramnath Goenka Award for Excellence in Journalism. Painting a media scenario where stereotyping people or places will find no place in tomorrow's India, Dr Singh said, "I also believe that a 'journalism of courage' is not just about giving voice to those who are willing to shout, but it is about giving voice to the voiceless and to those who choose to be silent. Objectivity does not imply neutrality. It implies respect for truth and facts, and a willingness to take positions, howsoever contrarian or contentious."

Couple of months before, the media had run various success stories of the police and security forces in Jammu and Kashmir. Among them were the killings in separate encounters of Pakistani militants, Abu Hamza, Zulfikar and Shaheen Bhai in February, March and December, respectively, of that year. Thanks to this year's

seismic revelation, which came through after the police got a lead in a case of a missing person of December 2006, five 'Pakistani militants' including these three turned out to be locals who had been struggling at the bottom of Kashmir's social hierarchy before being abducted by the State police and security agencies and killed for award money and promotions.

There is an ongoing popular movement in Kashmir questioning all such encounters wherein the killed had been identified as militants of foreign origin. What is not yet in question is the treatment of the news from and about Kashmir in the Indian media, both in print and on TV. Jammu and Kashmir is a victim of stereotyping not just in India's vibrant national media but, ironically, also in the regional press. Kashmiris have never counted on the local newspapers that are solely dependent upon the government for their advertising revenue and are unable to assert their right to unveil the truth. The local dailies or weeklies, barring a few, don't have reporters on the peripheries: the government, the police, the army and the local newsgathering agencies, which also draw information from the police, remain the only source of news.

Kashmir has faced media stereotyping in the streams of religion and ethnicity alone. Take, for example, the dogged and downtrodden community of Gujjars. The community is seen on TV only when a Gujjar labourer exhorts his fellow tribesmen to join the fight against the militants by being part of a village defence committee, armed bands of villagers sponsored by the security forces, like Salwa Judum of Chattisgarh. Their life and social conditions are all too missing in the media coverage.

Kashmiri Pandits displaced in 1990 following the gruesome murders of prominent figures of the community and the then governor's prodding is another example of how religion is used to

stereotype a particular community. Rather than attending to the miseries of this displaced people, the media projected this community as a hounded Hindu minority. On the contrary, the community is an inseparable part of Kashmir's civilizational ethos, which even Mahatma Gandhi had believed was more Central Asian than Indian.

Kashmir is projected to the outer world the way these news outlets want or are compelled to portray. State and Central information departments have a huge paraphernalia functioning in the state that constantly keeps a tab on the news coverage. With the highest counter-insurgency grid, namely, Unified Headquarters comprising administrative units as well, the perception that media management has become an important feature of counter-insurgency in Kashmir is now a conspicuous reality.

People in Kashmir have been facing invisibility and denial ever since they were left unattended during the decolonization process in the sub-continent. The conflict intensified again in 1989 and led to a limited war in Kargil between India and Pakistan, both of whom were by then nuclear powers. This made Kashmir a nuclear flash point, hence the international focus. Global media majors such as BBC, CNN, AP, Reuters and AFP set up their bureaus in Kashmir. But most of the wire agencies have an insulting stylesheet for Kashmir. The non-State actors whom we precisely call militants are referred to as 'Islamic militants' or 'Muslim rebels' in their reportage. This kind of portrayal induces a dangerous thought that the 'Muslim rebels', fighting for the Muslims in J&K, are locked in a battle with the 'Hindu army'. Although these agencies plainly refer to the army as Indian soldiers or troops, yet the way they portray militants automatically induces a communal impression.

There is also a strong presence of Indian TV channels, but when it comes to Kashmir, the TV screens either beam a sketch of a bearded 'wanted militant' or a band of *burqa*-clad activists protesting the growing trend of progressive lifestyles. The stereotypical image of Kashmir created over the years by the media weighs so heavy on the security establishment that when the police held some suspects in Delhi while inquiring into the dastardly Mumbai train blasts in July last, they gave out a fallacious reason for their arrest: "They looked like Kashmiris". Encouragingly, conscious sections of the Indian civil society objected to this racist remark.

From the image of a simpleton boatman 'Raja' in Suraj Prakash's 1965 hit *Jab Jab Phool Khile* to the gun wielding 'Altaf' in Vidhu Vinod Chopra's 2000 hit *Mission Kashmir*, the image of a Kashmiri in the Indian media has come a long way. If yesterday 'Raja' represented the entire people suffering from famine and lack of employment opportunities, today 'Altaf' represents the people caught between the State and non-State violence. Both portrayals are limited to a section, hence not the entire people.

When the conflict emerges out of a confrontation between the ideologies of the State and non-State forces, reporting it needs not just a deeper understanding but a commitment to the truth. The State's ideology is that its security forces are fighting a war against 'terrorists' to restore peace, while the non-State actors profess an ideology that they are fighting to 'liberate' the people from the 'occupier'. The victory of truth over ideology is vital when India and Pakistan have embarked upon the challenge to bridge the divides. Let Indian civil society overcome the attention deficit that Kashmiris have been suffering for the last 60 years.

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## **IFJ DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES ON THE CONDUCT OF JOURNALISTS**

*This international Declaration is proclaimed as a standard of professional conduct for journalists engaged in gathering, transmitting, disseminating and commenting on news and information in describing events.*

- 1. Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.*
- 2. In pursuance of this duty, the journalist shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news, and of the right of fair comment and criticism.*
- 3. The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he/she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify documents.*
- 4. The journalist shall use only fair methods to obtain news, photographs and documents.*
- 5. The journalist shall do the utmost to rectify any published information which is found to be harmfully inaccurate.*
- 6. The journalist shall observe professional secrecy regarding the source of information obtained in confidence.*
- 7. The journalist shall be aware of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins.*
- 8. The journalist shall regard as grave professional offences the following: \* plagiarism; \* malicious misrepresentation; \* calumny, slander, libel, unfounded accusations; \* acceptance of a bribe in any form in consideration of either publication or suppression.*
- 9. Journalists worthy of the name shall deem it their duty to observe faithfully the principles stated above. Within the general law of each country the journalist shall recognize in professional matters the jurisdiction of colleagues only, to the exclusion of every kind of interference by governments or others.*

***(Adopted by the 1954 World Congress of the IFJ. Amended by the 1986 World Congress.)***



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