

PROPOSED 'DRACONIAN' MEDIA AUTHORITY

Pakistan adamant amid outcry

Forms committee to discuss it with stakeholders; journos, broadcasters, activists vow to prevent it; opposition parties call move 'unconstitutional'

DAWN/ANN

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of Pakistan has constituted a committee to liaise and discuss the Pakistan Media Development Authority (PMDA) — a proposed media regulatory body — with relevant stakeholders defying an outcry.

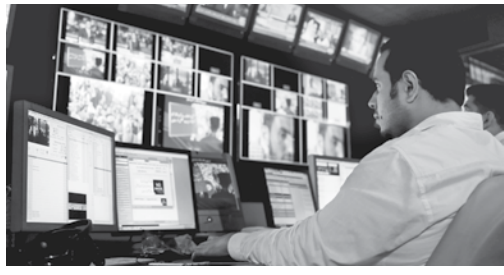
The proposal to establish the media regulatory authority has met with strong criticism from journalists, activists and the opposition.

However, in a notification issued yesterday, the ministry said State Minister for Information and Broadcasting Farukh Habib would head the committee that would comprise three other members.

The PMDA is a proposed regulatory body that can "cater to the professional and business requirements of all forms of media and their users", according to a government proposal, and is meant to replace the current "fractured" regulatory environment and "fragmented" media regulation by multiple bodies. This means that according to the proposal, the PMDA solely will be responsible for the regulation of print, broadcast and digital media in Pakistan.

Under an ordinance drafted for the establishment of the authority, all previous laws pertaining to media regulation, control or indirect control will likely be abolished and fresh legislation will be enacted, giving legal cover to the PMDA and its functions.

No other body but the Supreme Court will



have the jurisdiction to question the legality of "anything done or any decision taken under the [PMDA] ordinance", the proposal states. In addition to its regulatory function, the authority will determine media employees' wages and resolve wage disputes.

Media organisations representing publishers, journalists, broadcasters, editors and news directors have rejected the proposed PMDA Ordinance, describing the concept as an unconstitutional and draconian law against freedom of press and expression and a step towards imposing state control to regulate all segments of media.

Condemning the proposal, a press release issued by the PBA said the authority was "aimed against the freedom of press and expression" and a step towards imposing state control over media operations.

"The proposed PMDA is intended to hinder media freedoms and take control [of] the media

by the top information bureaucracy," the press release read. "The concept is an attempt to tighten [the] federal government's hold over the media through one draconian authority ignoring the fact that print, electronic and digital media are separate entities, each with their own defined features and respective regulatory laws."

According to the press release, media bodies have resolved to resist the establishment of the PMDA at all levels and form a joint action committee for the purpose.

Besides, the PML-N and PPP, the two major political opposition to Imran Khan's ruling party, have expressed concern over the government's plan to establish the PMDA and vowed to resist it with full force.

In a statement issued on Monday, PML-N information secretary Mariyum Aurangzeb declared the government's move to establish the PMDA through an ordinance an "unconstitutional step" and in conflict with Article 19 of the Constitution which guaranteed freedom of expression and a free media in the country.

PPP's parliamentary leader in the Senate Sherry Rehman said in a separate statement that the disastrous effect that this ordinance would have on media and freedom of expression was "unacceptable".

"The civil society and media rights groups have termed the ordinance media martial law. Through this media outlets will either become state mouthpieces or go under," she decried.

POST-COUP CRISIS IN MYANMAR

Pupils suffer amid violence, boycott

REUTERS

No more than a quarter of Myanmar's more than 12 million pupils enrolled for the new school year amid a protest boycott against military rule and in the wake of a series of bombings, an official of a teachers' group said.

There were noticeably fewer students at many schools in the main city of Yangon as the new academic year began on Tuesday for the first time since both the February 1 coup and the relaxation of curbs imposed last year against the spread of Covid-19.

Security forces stood guard at some schools and brought pupils under armed escort from their homes.

An official of the Myanmar Teachers' Federation, who sought anonymity for fear of retribution, said that even fewer pupils had turned out than had been enrolled because parents were concerned about security, as well as joining the boycott. Teachers were also afraid, he said, adding, "Some teachers go to school in normal clothing and change into their uniforms only inside the school."

Reuters was unable to reach either the junta or its education ministry for comment. The junta-controlled Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper quoted Win Win Nwe, the headmistress of a school in Yangon's Kamayut township, as saying that about 30% of pupils had been enrolled there.

Teachers and students have been on the front line of anti-junta protests and the teachers' federation said more than 125,000 teachers, from a total of more than 430,000, had been suspended for joining a civil disobedience movement.

The phrase, "We're not sending our children to school," has been trending on social media since mid-May.

The junta complained that "politically extreme terrorist groups, who wish to destroy national interests" had been threatening pupils and teachers to disrupt education.



Xi calls for greater global media reach

REUTERS, Shanghai

China President Xi Jinping said the country must improve the way it tells its "stories" to a global audience as it seeks to develop an international voice that reflects its status on the world stage, official news agency Xinhua reported.

Speaking at a Communist Party study meeting, Xi said it was crucial for China to improve its ability to spread its messages globally in order to present a "true, three-dimensional and comprehensive China", Xinhua said on Tuesday.

China needed to develop an "international voice" to match its national strength and global status, Xinhua said, citing Xi. It also needed to strengthen propaganda efforts to help foreigners understand the Chinese Communist Party and the way it "strives for the happiness of the Chinese people".

The country needed to create a team of professionals and adopt "precise communication methods" for different regions, he said.

China's relationship with foreign media has become increasingly tense in recent years, with local news outlets such as the Global Times often singling out foreign reporters for what it says is biased and unfair coverage.

Several journalists working for US news organisations were expelled last year as relations between the two sides deteriorated.

China has also banned BBC World News from mainland Chinese television networks following criticism of the British broadcaster's coverage of human rights in the northwestern region of Xinjiang as well as the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic.



Smoke rises from a fire onboard the MV X-Press Pearl vessel as it sinks while being towed into deep sea off the Colombo Harbour, in Sri Lanka yesterday. The cargo ship carrying tonnes of chemicals sank off Sri Lanka's west coast, its navy said yesterday, and tonnes of plastic pellets have fouled the country's rich fishing waters in one of its worst-ever marine disasters. The navy was preparing to deal with an oil spill of 350 tonnes which the ship estimated to have in its fuel tanks.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Blasts target 2 buses in Kabul; at least 12 killed

REUTERS, Kabul

Two separate bomb blasts on two public transport buses killed at least 12 civilians in the Afghan capital Kabul, security officials said yesterday, the latest in a series of such attacks in recent weeks as foreign forces withdraw.

Both attacks took place on Tuesday evening in western parts of the capital that are home to many from the country's Shia community, a religious minority in Afghanistan targeted in the past by groups such as Islamic State, the officials said.

Ferdaws Faramarz, Kabul police spokesman, said both buses were carrying passengers when the explosion occurred that killed at least 12 and wounded 10 more. The police launched an investigation, he said.

Roadside bombs, small magnetic bombs attached under vehicles, and other attacks have targeted members of security forces, judges, government officials, civil society

activists and journalists in recent months in Afghanistan.

No group claimed responsibility for the twin bombings.

The government usually blames the Taliban for such attacks but the insurgent group denies involvement.

Violence has sharply increased since Washington announced plans to withdraw all US troops from Afghanistan by Sept. 11.

The bombings on Tuesday took place three weeks after a bomb attack outside a school in the same part of Kabul. Following the school attack, an official toll put the number of dead, most of them students, at 68, but a senior government official later said 80 had died.

Nearly 1,800 Afghan civilians were killed or wounded in the first three months of 2021 during fighting between government forces and Taliban insurgents despite efforts to find peace, the United Nations said last month.

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