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## Where our media stands

Polarisation and partisanship would eventually bring them nothing except disgrace

By Sajid Abbasi

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There are three traditional pillars of any state: legislature, executive and judiciary. They enact laws, apply them and also interpret the same. The media is considered as the 'fourth pillar' of any state and plays an exceptionally important role in disseminating, informing, educating and reforming society in a larger perspective. Objectivity, truthfulness, fairness and impartiality are some of the fundamentals which media is supposed to adhere to for its judicious contribution in the moral, social and economic uplift of any civilised society. This is a globally accepted and practiced narrative.

There is no denying the fact that the Pakistani media has had turbulent periods, both in political and dictatorial regimes, during the last 70 years while exercising their constitutional right of freedom of expression. This has been primarily the fate of print media operators in the country. However, the emergence of electronic media during the Musharraf regime changed the landscape of Pakistani media in the last one and a half decade.

There is a widespread discussion over the last few months about politicians being *sadiq* (truthful) and *ameen* (righteous). There is little disagreement over it. Political leaders should be truthful and honest while being representatives of people in parliament. One must, however, also accept the reality that Pakistan is not just about politics and politicians. The other segments of society and institutions are as much important and crucial as are the political leaders in the process of nation building, and in an effort to establish a just and enlightened society. Politicians are the easiest target of criticism in all respects. So how many people do we see around us fulfilling the criteria of being *sadiq* and *ameen*? The answer is perhaps disappointing.

Let's look at the role of media in Pakistan, particularly the electronic media, as it is taken as the most important component of our social fabric. While covering the issue of Panama Papers, our media, especially the electronic media, was clearly seen divided and polarised. Pro-government TV channels were pretending to save the democratisation process whereas anti-government TV channels were pro-establishment, and often pro-PTI.

Most of the news channels have been framing the Panama issue according to their respective interests or due to the unseen influence from the power corridors. They were clearly seen exercising propaganda and framing techniques while reporting the news or discussing the Panama issue. One could clearly identify the pro-government or anti-government lobbies of TV anchors on different channels. Journalistic ethics and professionalism were hardly followed. The salient principles of objectivity, fairness and impartiality were set aside and only pre-formed agendas were followed by the mainstream news channels, especially in their talk shows. Exceptions apart, personal opinions and wishes were propagated in the garb of analysis and current affairs programmes. Journalists were even seen celebrating the Panama verdict in videos on social media. Celebrated TV anchors openly congratulated one another after it. They became party to the case instead of restricting themselves to their professional demands.

As a result of this division among journalists and anchors, the viewers and readers too (to an extent) were divided as far as their media choices were concerned for information and news. People were glued to the screens of their selective channels where they could get gratification.

The question which needs serious consideration here is how we can redress this polarised media, particularly the electronic media where partisan journalism has taken root. Can media moguls and working journalists prove themselves as *sadiq*

and *ameen* to their viewers and readers when politicians have been generally branded otherwise? Polarisation and partisanship would eventually bring them nothing except disgrace. They should serve the nation through their quality content, irrespective of any likes or dislikes.

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