

# **INTERVIEW**

## **JAVED JABBAR, FORMER FEDERAL MINISTER AND SENATOR, FOUNDING PRESIDENT BAANHN BELI**

**Interviewed by  
SYED HAFEEZ UR RAHMAN  
College of Management Sciences  
PAF-Karachi Institute of Economics & Technology  
E-mail: Syed\_Hafeez1@hotmail.com**

**Market Forces:** Could you please highlight differences and similarities between Benazir Bhutto's and Gen. Pervaiz Musharaf's governments with respect to liberalization of media policy?

**Javed Jabbar:** Benazir Bhutto's government was political in nature, Malik Mairaj Khalid's government was a civilian care taker government and Gen. Pervaiz Musharaf is a military leader. All these governments shared an open, progressive, tolerant attitude towards freedom of expression. During their first five months all three governments especially Benazir Bhutto's laid emphasis on liberalization of media policy. Then we can say a personality contrast became evident as Benazir Bhutto was the first woman to head a Muslim state. She faced Nawaz Sharif the chief minister of the most populous and resourceful province as the opposition. General Musharaf did not face such conflict but his was a military regime with little direct experience of political management. As against this seasoned and experienced politicians were in charge under Benazir. There was a difference in regime composition and this was reflected in their respective media policies.

**Market Forces:** What were your major contributions towards reform of media structure especially during 1988 and 1999?

**Javed Jabbar :** Time magazine commented in April 1989 that there is a marked change and improvement in media policy in Pakistan. They gave credit to me but I think credit should go to the People's Party government. The measures we took in 1988 and 1989 were as follows:

For the first time we introduced coverage of the opposition on Radio and TV on a daily basis. Previously such coverage used to be restricted to election times or to some

special occasions. Instead of the news-caster, the opposition leaders themselves were presented on the media saying what they liked.

Day to day interference by the ministry on what should be said in the khabarnama and current affairs programs was minimized. The ministry allowed TV and Radio to develop these programs independently.

We abolished the black list of intellectuals and activists and leaders barred from appearing on Radio and TV during the entire period of General Ziaul Haq's rule.

We ended the system by which journalists had to get NOC from the Ministry of Information before going abroad on the invitation of any foreign government. There used to be a system by which newsprint could only be imported by newspaper agencies on the basis of permits issued by the Ministry of Information. We abolished that system. To do away with corruption, black marketing, price manipulation etc. we allowed restriction free import of newsprint. We appointed very independent minded editors and journalists to senior most positions in the National Press Trust and at Pakistan Times and Mushriq. We appointed people like I. A. Rahman and Aziz Siddique as Editor in Chief and Editor of Pakistan Times. We were moving towards the abolition of NPT, an organization founded in the era of Ayub Khan's government in 1960s. We also encouraged open debate on many issues and introduced new kinds of programs on TV like music for young people. In fact the whole media environment was changed. In Malik Meraj Khalid's government for the first time in Pakistan's history we introduced an ordinance by which private TV and Radio channels could be established. Nawaz Shariff did not implement that law. I then created something called CMC Citizen Media Commission of Pakistan to generate pressure on the government for the establishment of private media. When General Pervaiz Musharraf came to power he asked me to serve on the cabinet as minister of information. We revived the EMRA law under the name of RAMBO and finally it was implemented in 2002 as PEMRA. We again abolished the news print permit regime, which had been brought back by Nawaz's government.

**Market Forces:** Tell us some thing about your social work. How does it fit in with your other roles?

**Javed Jabbar :** I do not see any conflict between social work and government duties because it's a question of managing time. Baanhn Beli is one of several organizations which I have had a pleasure of founding. It's a question of having a team and creating an organizational concept, which can continue work even if you are not there all the time. So my involvement is of a voluntary nature. Full time staff looks after day-to-day activities. I give time every day and they manage it very well.

**Market Forces:** What should be the role of government in maintaining and strengthening freedom of expression and democratic principles in communication?

**Javed Jabbar :** Government has a very important role to play in framing the right kind of laws and keeping these laws under constant review so that if some laws are misused or conditions change and the laws are out dated, they can promptly be amended. New technology creates new possibilities and therefore government has a responsibility to protect freedom of expression and at the same time to keep the laws as close to the technology, to innovation and social changes as possible. Government has a very major responsibility to keep vigilance in this respect and to give protection to journalists and to the media from undue harassment, pressure by criminal elements or by those who do not agree with the viewpoint taken by media representatives.

**Market Forces:** Do you really think that the measures taken by Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) towards reform of media structure go far enough?

**Javed Jabbar:** We need to remember that PTA is no longer concerned with the task of giving licenses to cable TV operators or to any other media service providers. They have authority when it comes to allocation of technology, which is relevant to transmission of media but even for that FAB (frequency allocation board) plays a role. PTA has no authority to issue licenses for electronic media and each provincial government has the authority to issue permission to new ventures. Similarly cinema is more or less a provincial subject except in the case of the censor board, which is under the control of the federal ministry.

**Market Forces:** Are other structural reforms with respect to PTA required?

**Javed Jabbar:** PTA and media do not have a direct relationship and the responsibility for regulation is now divided between Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), Ministry of Culture (for cinema) and the Ministry of Information (for newspapers). Other media providers like cell phone operators and internet service providers come under PTA and the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology. These agencies are doing a good job in their respective areas.

**Market Forces:** Has media in Pakistan played an honest role in order to bring the real facts regarding the Azad Kashmir earthquake and the blasphemous cartoons to the common man?

**Javed Jabbar:** Pakistani media made a tremendous contribution to raising awareness within Pakistan about the tragedy of the Azad Kashmir earthquake and also about letting the outside world know what was happening in Pakistan. The media served as active agents in mobilizing public sympathy and as reporters. Some media agencies, not all, went too far being hyper critical about some aspects of the relief effort and perhaps not enough attention was given to positive efforts by official elements, some official bodies and individuals did excellent work in such a difficult situation.

**On the cartoon issue** I think the media should have played a more restrained role in suggesting to people that the best way to express protest is not through demonstrations or strikes but through organizing letters of protest addressed to western newspapers and

to the European Union and to other governments in Europe. The media could have helped more than what it did in this regard in promoting moderation and tolerance.

**Market Forces:** How is the Indian government portraying the Kashmir issue through their media?

**Javed Jabbar:** The Indian government does not control the Indian media except for Doordarshan which is their official TV and radio network. All the other media channels in India are supposed to be private but even though they are private they have a similar stand on Kashmir as the Indian government. The subject of Kashmir receives a great deal of attention when there is some thing violent or negative that happens in Kashmir. They give a lot of importance to such events. But when there is something positive, something that shows the capacity of the people of Kashmir to be more human or some event showing friendship emerging between the people of Kashmir in India and Pakistan that kind of news is not given the attention that it deserves. Most important, the human rights violations, which occur so often in Indian held Kashmir by Indian troops are not given adequate coverage by the Indian media. This is where credit goes to PTV and Radio Pakistan, which are the only channels in the whole world that give daily coverage of what is happening in Indian held Kashmir.

**Market Forces:** How can private TV channels contribute towards good governance?

**Javed Jabbar:** Private channels can highlight cases of misgovernance and bring them to the attention of those who are responsible. They can raise public awareness about what the public itself should also do to ensure good governance whether it is correct payment of taxes and bills or issues such as tax avoidance. Such practices should be discouraged and the media have a duty to learn from other countries how this is being done. Private sector media have an enormous educative and mobilizing role to play when it comes to what society can do and certainly with respect to highlighting the social responsibility of the media and the citizens.

**Market Forces:** How can we improve the quality of advertisement and film making?

**Javed Jabbar:** Training is the key. Advertisers and marketers should be given the broadest possible education and training in different disciplines especially in script writing and developing ideas and also technical proficiency of writing a good script. That is one area where we are very weak in Pakistan. Our scripts are not written as thoughtfully and carefully, as they should be.

**Market Forces:** What are your comments on the performance of Citizen Media Commission of Pakistan (CMC)?

**Javed Jabbar:** As founding president of the commission I am proud of the fact that for seven years this commission has been observing electronic media freedom day on

14 February to raise public awareness and to raise government awareness on vital media policy issues and to strengthen freedom of expression of electronic media.

Secondly, it has mobilized participants' support from citizens across the country through its activities.

Thirdly, it has published a series of monographs and booklets on various aspects of media policy.

Fourthly, last year we converted the commission from an informal network into a formal body, which will be registered in the year 2006. There are chapters in all four provinces and in Islamabad and the remarkable thing is that the chapters in Balochistan, NWFP, and Sindh are headed by women and include very prominent citizens, who are dedicated to the idea that there should be public awareness of the role of media in national development and public affairs.

**Market Forces:** Why have media management programs of many business schools not been successful?

**Javed Jabbar:** Business schools have not prepared a curriculum in a manner that ensures proximity and closeness between the conditions on the ground and what is taught in the classroom. Then there should be greater linkages between individual media houses and formulation of curriculum and the teaching process.

The media scene is changing so rapidly that there may be lack of flexibility when it comes to preparing contents of courses and conduct of examination and criteria on which people are judged in such courses.

**Market Forces:** Any latest development in terms of tools and techniques in media and advertising, which you would suggest should be incorporated in media management curricula?

**Javed Jabbar:** Both marketing and advertising are very vast and complex subjects. Advertising itself has many facets to it. So just one course called principles of advertising and or principles of marketing cannot do justice to all aspects. We should look into the aspect of increasing the coverage of various facets of advertising.

**Market Forces:** Any tips for fresh business graduates who want to pursue their career in marketing advertising?

**Javed Jabbar:** There is tremendous scope for able, gifted, young practitioners. There is a need to develop professionalism and quality in the use of language. Language skills are becoming very weak and language should not be seen as merely the use of words. Language is an instrument for precise and analytical, scientific and creative thinking and if young people want to do well they should improve their communication skills by reading more extensively. General reading will help them to do better.

**Market Forces:** Private TV Channels are promoting promiscuity. Do you agree with the view that strict censorship should be imposed on them?

**Javed Jabbar:** My preference is not to impose censorship because once you give some people the power to impose censorship there is a tendency to misuse that power. So the owners of TV channels should be engaged in a dialogue with citizen groups who have views on that subject. Alternative approaches should be considered. Promiscuity is not invented by the media. It exists in society so the media is simply reflecting part of it but there has to be a balance so I would not go for censorship. I would go for dialogue and that is why I would like to mention Citizen media dialogue. It's a concept in a website which I wrote for UNESCO last year. The address of the website is [www.wiredet.com / cmd](http://www.wiredet.com/cmd). I would encourage citizens to visit that website and see how people themselves can develop a better and more effective relationship with the media.