### Course Name: Media Ethics and Laws

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### Press and Publication Ordinance (PPO)

This ordinance was passed in Field Marshal **Ayub Khan’s regime** in 1963. This ordinance contained the harshest of laws curtailing freedom of expression and the progressive development of the media and leading to the March 1969 relinquishing of power by President Ayub Khan to General Yahya Khan who imposed martial law.

It was formed and enforced to keep the newspapers under government’s control. It was a black law completely boycotted by media organizations and journalists.

In 1963, West Pakistan Press and Publications Ordinance and East Pakistan Press and Publications Ordinance were introduced by the provincial governments, the pressure built by these provincial laws resulted into an amendment in PPO but even after that its harshness remained same.

In 1964, National Press Trust was established and all the PPL papers were given to this monster. NPT had right to take over any such newspaper, magazine which is apparently financially not able to run the newspaper or is dangerous to country’s security. Apparently it was an independent body but actually it was state-controlled.

After PPL’s publications Daily Mashriq was also handed over to NPT, Sindhi paper Hilal-e-Pakistan was also taken over, Morning News which was being published since 1936 first from Calcutta and after partition from Karachi and Dhaka was also taken over. Some Bengali newspapers were also taken over by NPT. Dawn, Jung, Nawa-e-waqt were the only papers that were not taken in government’s custody but they still had a tough time in Ayub’s time as they were not liked by government.

Another harsh action taken against press by Ayub’s government was the condition imposed on international news agencies that they cannot directly send news to their subscribers in Pakistan. They were asked to send their news via APP or PPI. This action was taken to control and restrict the news and information coming from international media from reaching to Pakistani people.

General Khan relied heavily on one of the measures of this ordinance, the system of press advice given out by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in order to avoid publication of news and reports deemed unsuitable forpublic consumption. It was also during this period that newspapers and magazines known for their independent and progressive views were first taken over by the government. Eventually the National Press Trust, created in 1964, took over these journals and acted as a front to control a section of the press. This press law (PPO) endured for 25 years before being repealed in September 1988.

**According to the PPO:**

* Power was granted to a district magistrate for the declaration purpose of a newspaper after a personal interview with the applicant. The reason behind channelizing the process was to ensure that the newspaper owner had enough financial resources. To ensure the following of rules of media and its ethics, this ordinance also intended to ensure that the newspaper editor had reasonable command on journalism. To ensure the protection of Pakistan’s interests, the declaration was liable to be rejected. However, if we review this critically, such a move was dominantly intended to safeguard the interests of the government at that time. Ayub Khan was vigilant and wise enough to understand the potential power media had.
* The salient feature which said that “no foreigner shall be allowed to own or hold a newspaper until by special permission from government. If permitted, the foreign owner still cannot hold more than 25% of the entire proprietary inserts.”
* To further control the activities of Press, the Speaker of National and Provincial Assemblies were given power to forbid publications whenever deemed necessary. This act gave immense power to the assemblies by helping them only project what they intended to. The government, through Press and Publication Ordinance of 1963 gained immense power over the Press.
* A good measure to curtail the activities of Press was the issuance of the list of 15 offences under Section 24(1). This helped in controlling the Press from the ethical point of view. Journalists could not adopt an aggressive approach. To further help the government and the Press regarding the transparency issue, financial accounts were to be maintained by the publishers and printers.This move helped the Press as a whole to overcome financial crisis.
* Another step taken in PPO was the imposition of penalties by law if the newspapers missed/omitted the features of what paper publishing news should contain. If print line wasn’t published, fines were levied to the newspaper. This was done to ensure uniformity in the pattern of newspaper printing among all newspapers. Keeping the press without declaration was illegal and false statements in the declaration were disallowed in order to achieve the supremacy of law.
* From a critical point of view, the ordinance was intended to channelize the workings of the Press. However, from the implementation point-of-view, such measures had a certain degree of failure too. The reason behind that is that in 1963, Pakistan was in an infancy stage of development. The literacy rate of the country was very low. People had little know-how about what happened around the country due to lack of technological development and effective means of communication. Moreover, the government had stressed on accountability while the Press wanted freedom of speech. If a midway would have been found, our media would have been much better than it is now. If the concept of an accountable freedom of speech could have been enforced, things would have presented themselves from a unique angle.