

Mainstream Media and CPEC; An Analysis of Coverage given to Balochistan

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Abstract

The role of mainstream media in catering the national interests from the context of the project of CPEC hangs in the balance as the media has only given coverage to the positive aspects of the project while largely neglecting the ramifications of CPEC over the grievous communities of Balochistan and other provinces. Is the media really catering the national interest, if the grievances and the apprehensions of the public are not resolved and only the positive side of a project is given coverage while neglecting the ramifications that can leave deep imprints on the lives of the very citizens of Pakistan? It is truly the opposite of journalistic ethics. This article also focuses on the representation of the Baloch community by the mainstream media from the context of the CPEC project in the light of national interests. For this purpose, some tables were also used in which 150 respondents from Gawadar and Quetta participated and all of whom were post graduate students.

Key words: CPEC, mainstream, analysis, coverage, national interest, media, journalism, sensationalism, Balochistan

Introduction

There is no denying the fact that CPEC is the most sensationalized issue in the history of the national media which from its very inception has been pervasive on the media debates. However, for most of the part, the debates and discussion of the media personnel and the political analysts are about the nature of the relationship of China in Pakistan or they are about the relevance of the project with the economic boom of the country. CPEC is, without any shadow of a doubt, a game changer, but it can be a game changer if the provincial disagreements are removed through the

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consensus building efforts of media and the apprehensions of the people are removed by conveying their problems and issues to the concerned authorities. (Baloch, 2016)

Prosperous and progressive Baluchistan is in the best interests of Pakistan by all means. If Balochistan is not stable and not prosperous, the nationalist sentiments will get empowered as the roots of nationalism are already very much high in the province. It is due to the high stake of sentiments and apprehensions which give rise to nationalism and then extreme level of nationalism leads them to insurgent activities.

It is also a very big challenge for the political parties as their mutual rivalries and struggle for power continues to hinder their united voice for equal participation and equal share in the CPEC. Political struggle is the key to persuading the federal government through peaceful means for bringing Balochistan on the equal footing. (BBC, 2014)

The news channels have engaged in a marathon about news making and every channel is engaged in the competition to bring spicy news first to people than other channels. Out of all this, no news channel really cares about the public and their reaction. Political issues of real importance are pushed back and the simple issues with more sensation are brought forward. Owing to this performance of media, the public sees every positive measure or policy of the government with suspicion and skepticism.

Background

There is no denying the fact that the media is the cornerstone of public representation to the government and vice versa. It works like a bridge. It not only helps in the communication of the public to the elected representatives, in fact, it also works to promote their interests while keeping in view the national interests as well. However, the media can prove disastrous and misleading if it goes astray from its constitutional parameters. In other ways, if the media even wants to work under the commitments of the constitutional limits, then the censorship from the government hinders its professionalism. (Imtiaz, 2014)

Censorship then molds the interests of the media in accordance with the interests of the establishment. Similarly, the national media of Pakistan has seen many ages of censorship. The post-independence Pakistani government is one constantly intermingled with military rule, corruption, public unrest, and political feuds. Just one year after the independence of Pakistan, Jinnah died on September 11, 1948, and Liaquat became the nation's new leader.

In 1951, three years after the tragic death of the “Father of Pakistan,” Liaquat Ali Khan was assassinated. The lack of dynamic and visionary leadership not only created a leadership vacuum, but it also left the establishment unbridled which left deep imprints on the media as well. Media remained strictly under the government control till 2001 when for the first time General Parvez Musharraf liberalized the media giving way to the privatization of the media.

However, being so much under the control of the government and competing for commercial interests, the electronic media engaged in sensationalism losing its true track. CPEC is not the first project that has been sensationalized, many issues have been sensationalized. Nevertheless, the focal point is the attitude of the media toward the given issue. Most of the times, the Pakistani electronic as well as the print media have focused on one side of the picture while neglecting the sides that do not earn much TRP for them. (Baloch, 2015)

In the case of CPEC, the media has mostly clung to the fact that CPEC is a game changer. It is true that CPEC is a game changer, not only for Pakistan, nay, for the entire region of South Asia, if it is executed in the full spirit and under the commitments of justice and equity. It is true that no such investment has ever been recorded in the history of the country, therefore, every province and every community has come forward for its due share and they are justified in their position.

As far as the Baloch community is concerned, the most crucial part of the CPEC, the port of Gawadar comes in their area. Therefore, their claims of ownership and representation are not exaggerated and they are under the constitutional limits by all legal means. The mainstream media gives less or no coverage at all to the ramifications of the CPEC on the local populations. Their grievances are not as extreme that they could jeopardize the national interests, yet the mainstream media avoids their representation. (Abid, 2015)

In 24 hours of the unstopped news broadcasting, the coverage given to Balochistan is of mere couple of minutes which is not par with the ethics of journalism by any means. If a terrorist attack takes place in Balochistan, the news channels run hours of coverage showing the insecurity of the province, but when it comes the genuine and basic problems of the people of Balochistan, the solution of which could mitigate the insurgent tendencies in the province, the media remains in sullen silence. (Akbar, 2017)

For the very reason, the people from the other provinces only know Balochistan as a land of security crisis, but they are ignorant of its cultural heritage and richness, the hospitality of the people and the good traits its

Baloch and Pakhtoon communities have maintained over centuries. Demanding for its due share in the colossal mega project of 62 billion dollars (CPEC), is not treason. In fact, the due shares will minimize the center-province tensions and will also diminish the sense of deprivation among the people. (Zafar, 2015)

Brief overview of Media in Balochistan

As compared to other parts of Pakistan, journalism in Balochistan could not manage to have a strong presence before and after independence. Journalism in other regions flourished significantly and in Balochistan it reached in 1888 when the first newspaper named as “Quetta Gazette” was launched which managed to continue its publication till 1935. From 1888 to 1935 only 15 newspapers had their presence in Balochistan. Some of the prominent personalities that contributed for the growth and expansion of journalism in Balochistan are known as Yousuf Aziz Magsi, Abdul Samad Khan Achakzai, Abdul Aziz Kurd, Ghulam Ahmed Shahwani, Syed Zahoor Shah Hashumi, Muhammad Hussain Anqa, Abdul Kareem Shorish and Gul Khan Naseer (Notezai, 2013). Till the 1960s there existed no notable dailies and weeklies in Balochistan. However, in 1989 a group of six weeklies (Zamana, Nara-e-Haq, Meezan, Pasban, Qasid and Pukar) formed a collective platform named as “Daily Group”. With the passage of time journalism kept growing in Balochistan and in present time most of the leading newspapers and TV channels have their offices and bureaus in Balochistan. However, as compared to other parts of the countries, Balochistan gets the least coverage from the national TV channels and newspapers (Siraj, 2011).

Methodology

Methodology is a crucial part of the research. For the given topic “**Mainstream Media and CPEC; An Analysis of Coverage given to Balochistan**” quantitative method of the research was used along with descriptive method as well.

Some tables were included in the article in order to broaden the scope of the understanding of the audience toward the topic. The tables contained the opinions of the post graduate students of Quetta and Gawadar. For this purpose the data was collected from 150 students belonging to different universities of Balochistan.

Findings

Tables

The international media presents a negative picture of CPEC

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	90	62.3	62.3	62.3
Agree	40	24.0	24.0	86.3
Neutral	15	9.3	9.3	95.7
Disagree	4	2.0	2.0	97.7
Strongly Disagree	1	2.3	2.3	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

The responses attained from the participants were put through the SPSS for this question. About the question that the international media presents a negative picture of CPEC, the ratio of the respondents was as the following; 90 of them strongly agreed to the question in point while 40 of them agreed. The neutrality ratio was 15 of the respondents. On the other hand, 4 of them disagreed while 1 of them strongly disagreed to the above mentioned question.

It is obvious that every country has its own national objectives and the media of those countries follows their respective national interests. If the international media presents a negative picture of CPEC, then the project is not at par with their national interests. For instance, India and USA have been hell bent on opposing CPEC so have their media outlets because CPEC is a direct threat to their hegemony and influence in the region of South Asia.

The media in no country is free to the core. Every country has its own form or kind of censorship over the media. The media organizations in those countries very closely follow the national objectives. On the other hand, the media of Pakistan is though pursuing the national objectives like promoting brotherhood among the Muslim countries and raising its slogan for the liberation of Kashmir, but it has not done so in the case of Balochistan.

Does CPEC has the potential to become a game changer as presented by the mainstream media?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	100	75.7	75.7	75.7
No	33	16.3	16.3	92.0

Neut ral Total	17 150	8.0 100.0	8.0 100.0	100.0
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The responses attained from the participants were put through the SPSS for this question. About the question that does CPEC has the potential to become a game changer as presented by the mainstream media?

100 of them said yes while 33 of them were neutral and the rest of them said No.

The reason why the respondents said no is because they perceive the game changer means a positive change for all the communities, not development just for selected few. CPEC can prove to be a game changer only if every province receives its share of the employment and other benefits. Of all the 62 billion dollars worth of investment, even less than 4 billion dollars have been planned for different projects of Balochistan and Punjab receives the lion's share of the energy, infrastructural and telecommunication projects while the rest of the provinces have not got enough of the share.

The respondents were all post graduate students who know how to respond. They exactly know that CPEC is a game changer, but they also know that the game changer will not bring any radical changes in their lives if the settlers reap all the advantages. Therefore, their remarks in the above given question were somewhat negative. It depends on the nature of the development that is brought to the nation. Only the participatory sort of development can bring the largely alienated Baloch youth to the mainstream of the development process where they are an equal party to the development projects.

Q.19 Citizen journalism is the right medium for CPEC projection

	Frequ ency	Perce nt	Valid Percent	Cumula tive Percent
V al i d	Strong Agree	85	67.3	67.3
	Agree	30	11.3	78.7
	Neutral	13	7.0	85.7
	Disagree	12	8.3	94.0
	Strongly Disagree	10	6.0	100.0

Total	150	100.0 0	100.0
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The responses attained from the participants were put through the SPSS for this question. About the question that the Citizen journalism is the right medium for CPEC projection, the ratio of the respondents was as the following; 85 of them strongly agreed to the question in point while 30 of them agreed. The neutrality ratio was 13 of the respondents. On the other hand, 12 of them disagreed while 10 of them strongly disagreed to the above mentioned question.

Q.25 The media presents the positive aspects of CPEC in order to create an environment for settlers to move and settle in Gwadar

	Frequ ency	Perce nt	Valid Percent	Cumula tive Percent
Strong Agree	90	63.3	63.3	63.3
Agree	22	16.0	16.0	79.3
Neutral	17	12.3	12.3	91.7
Disagree	12	5.3	5.3	97.0
Strongly Disagree	9	3.0	3.0	100.0
Total	150	100. 0	100.0	

About the question that The media presents the positive aspects of CPEC in order to create an environment for settlers to move and settle in Gwadar, the ratio of the respondents was as the following; 90 of them strongly agreed to the question in point while 22 of them agreed. The neutrality ratio was 17 of the respondents. On the other hand, 12 of them disagreed while 9 of them strongly disagreed to the above mentioned question.

Discussion: There is no national dialogue, and no vision for the state: no place, in other words, where the young can make sense of their own country. Pakistan is ideologically adrift and headed toward incoherence, unable to articulate its own meaning as either a state or a nation. (BBC, 2012)

For this purpose, they promote the agendas of the concerned parties and in return receive support of parties. Instead of exposing the excesses of the governments, media often diverts public attention to other less important issues so that the ground realities remain unchanged and the political parties can have face saving run of the government. What needs to be done

at the part of media is to show a softer image of the country at first within and then in front of the world which is very necessary.

Media has eased the burden of non-employment from the state and brought the youth on the streamline by creating economic opportunities. Today, media has emerged as one of the most employed industries of Pakistan. (Abid, 2015)

The fact that perturbs the people of Balochistan is the future adjustment of the port and its benefits. They are highly apprehensive of the control and share of the port. Since the port of Gawadar is the juggernaut of the entire corridor without which the entire project and Chinese investment will be rendered ineffective, it has a greater value among the local people.

The media has not yet learned its lesson. Pakistani media is one of the largest in South Asia, but one of the most immature and the least ethically motivated media in the region. The media in Pakistan is highly advanced in its approach, its technology and its overall functioning machinery, but it is highly backward in true journalism.

The mixture of feelings and emotions if kept within the individuals does not really matter for the society, but if the sentiments and ideas become the posture of the channels then they shape the public attitude accordingly. The function of media is not to promote or reject certain ideas; its duty is merely to inform people and to bridge a link between the government and the society.

The representation of only the positive aspects of CPEC while neglecting the potential ramifications is not something which can serve the national interest. The grievances of the public with regard to CPEC must be heard and they must be addressed if found reasonable. (Hussain, 2017)

The mainstream media is too obsessed with sensationalism that catering for national interest under a free environment has become too arduous for it. Moreover, the censorship and dictation of the establishment is also exerting pressure on it to skip what they dislike and to adapt what they like.

Much to the nations chagrin, the media is more obsessed with sensationalism than representing reality. The ministry of information since the age of Ayub Khan in order to bring the media under its control has been pursuing the policy of giving favors and seeking favors. (Davis, 2012)

However, in Pakistan it is far from what is truly has to be. The privatization of media a couple of decades ago allowed all the business oriented people to jump into the opportunity. This is the reason that more than a dozen of news channels were created within a single decade, the last decade.

This nexus has made the media personnel so powerful that they can black mail and exploit any opportunity to exert pressure on the political forces to attain their interests. The media has emerged as the lobby which is very influential.

As a matter of fact, the representation of only the positive aspects of CPEC while neglecting the potential ramifications is not something which can serve the national interest. The grievances of the public with regard to CPEC must be heard and they must be addressed if found reasonable. (Ali, 2015)

Some liberal channels lash out against the religious parties, their policies become clear from their news debates, and they promote secular ideas. Some channels are inclining toward the military and some news channels are pro-democracy and they promote democratic agendas of the society. Portraying certain ideas have made the Pakistani media absolutely biased and they struggle to degrade the opponent ideas no matter how good they might be. This biasness is shaping a new character of Pakistani people. Most of the talk shows do not give accurate information on the CPEC, mostly they engage in speculations and baseless arguments which create panic among the people. Since the talk shows are the most effective platform to mold the public opinion, it is crucial to understand the level of the talk shows in Pakistan. (Khatak, 2018)

Conclusion

The public is the direct victim to this publicity. Public believes in everything it hears, thus, the public believes in the publicity based spicy news of media and it has badly disappointed the public from the governments, but also from media for not ventilating their grievances. The public has been sidelined and they have been ignored by all means.

Much to the nations chagrin, the media is more obsessed with sensationalism than representing reality. The ministry of information since the age of Ayub Khan in order to bring the media under its control has been pursuing the policy of giving favors and seeking favors. To add more to the role of the regional media, the regional media is under the charm of the mainstream media. More importantly, the regional media, especially, the regional media of Balochistan does not have a wider audience as compared to its national counterpart.

As a matter of the fact, the media is running after sensationalism in order to gain more and more TRP (Television Rating Points). On the other hand, the circulation of the print media is not as strong as the viewership of the

electronic media is. Therefore, the responsibility of the electronic media is greater in this respect to care for what it telecasts and how it telecasts.

It is true that the people are too inclined toward sensationalist news more than the reality. Negligence toward the genuine problems of the citizens of Pakistan will prove costly in the long run as more and more people will get alienated. CPEC is a project which bears the prospects of changing the regional dynamics. Balochistan can become the hub of global investment and the port of Gawadar can become the epicenter of global trade attention if the locals are treated in the best possible manner and the role of media in this regard cannot be denied.

It is time the media bears its responsibility and does what is best for the national interest and the best for the national interest is to see every possible aspect of CPEC because the local people are more valuable than any project.

Key recommendations

- ❖ The local TV channels and newspapers of Balochistan should play a significant role for the projection of CPEC as these media outlets are widely read and watched in most parts of Balochistan.
- ❖ The mainstream media can have a more responsible role by highlighting the issues and concerns of the indigenous population so that these concerns come into the notice of the concerned authorities.
- ❖ The media should be neutral in every aspect and should keep in view its duty to every citizen of the country with equal status. it should not favor one province over the other and should not favor one community over the other. if the constitutional rights of all the citizens of Pakistan are equal then why the media does not treat all the communities with equality.
- ❖ The media has to also focus on the ramifications of CPEC for the better interest of Pakistan. In this sense, the loopholes in the agreement can be revisited and it can further be modified for those communities as well who have so far been displeased with the project.
- ❖ Bringing the ramifications of the CPEC to the limelight does not tantamount to treason. It is only the genuine and ethical duty of the media to highlight the problems of the people of Pakistan and

convey them the government. Whether the issues are addressed or not is up to the government, but at least media should play its part.

- ❖ What the media has to do is to understand that the Baloch community is not asking for anything that comes in the category of treason. The best way to end the insurgency is to ascertain the local people of participatory development. As long as the local people are isolated from the mainstream society, they will be prone to insurgency. The media has to bring the attention of the government toward their plight and play its essential role in ending the sufferings of the Baloch community once and for all.

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