

ELECTION COMMISSION OF PAKISTAN

NOTIFICATION

Islamabad the 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2018.

No.F.14 (1)/2016-PR.(2) -- In exercise of the powers conferred upon it under Article 218 (3) of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan read with Section 233 of the Election Act, 2017 and all other powers enabling it in that behalf, the Election Commission of Pakistan is pleased to issue the Code of Conduct for Media for the General Elections, 2018 and subsequent bye-elections:

**A. DUTIES OF MEDIA**

**a. Duty to inform the public**

- (i) During the election period, all media have a duty to ensure that the public is properly informed about various electoral processes such as political parties, candidates, campaign and voting procedure etc.

**b. Duty of balance and impartiality**

- (i) Publicly owned media have a specific mandate requiring fairness and non-discrimination in their election reporting and not to discriminate against any political party or candidate.
- (ii) All media houses should also follow professional standards and strive for accuracy, balance and impartiality.
- (iii) The electronic and print media will ensure that news, current affairs, interviews, talk-shows, analysis and information programmes are not biased in favour of, or against, any party or candidate.
- (iv) The media shall:
  - (a) encourage journalisms of the highest standards in their election coverage and shall avoid all forms of rumors, speculation and disinformation, particularly when these concern specific political parties or candidates and where malicious intent is demonstrated;
  - (b) discourage all forms of hate speech that can be interpreted as incitement to violence or has the effect of promoting public disorder.
- (v) While it is not always possible to cover all candidates in an election, the media shall ensure that all candidates/parties shall be subject to journalistic scrutiny and appropriate media coverage.

**c. Duty to respect and promote tolerance**

- (i) The media have a duty to respect and promote tolerance and avoid all kind of discrimination on basis of religion, creed, gender, or ethnicity that might lead to hatred or violence.

**B. LAWS / RESTRICTIONS**

**a. Laws restricting freedom of expression**

- (i) Freedom of expression and the rights of journalists to report freely should be respected by all parties/candidates and state authorities during the election.
- (ii) There should be provision of full access to information during the election period and afterwards.

**b. Limits on prior restraint**

- (i) There should be no prior censorship of any election coverage/programme.
- (ii) Neither the authorities nor media outlets should interfere with the broadcast of any election programme or election coverage unless there is a real danger or threat of imminent harm and violence.

**c. Limits on media liability**

- (i) The media shall not be held responsible legally for unlawful statements made by candidates or party representatives and broadcast during the course of election campaigns. This, however, will not apply to the repeat/recorded telecasts or publications.

**C. PROGRAMMES / COVERAGE**

**a. Fair and balanced coverage**

- (i) Media shall comply with obligation of balance and impartiality that the law may place on them.
- (ii) The duty of balance requires that parties/candidates receive coverage commensurate with their relative importance in the election and the extent of their potential electoral support.
- (iii) State and private media are urged to keep a clear distinction between editorial/opinion, news and paid content. There will not be paid or sponsored news, election evaluation, analysis and editorial opinion.
- (iv) All paid materials, media campaigns for elections paid by candidates or their supporters must be clearly shown as Paid advertisements/campaign/content and should be done in a transparent manner.

**b. Direct access programmes**

- (i) Publicly owned media should grant all political parties/candidates' airtime and news space for direct access programmes on a fair and non-discriminatory basis.
- (ii) Parties/candidates that represent minorities or other marginalized groups should also be granted access to airtime and news space.

- (iii) Direct access programmes by the state media should be aired at times when the broadcasts are likely to reach the largest audiences.
- (iv) The duty of balance would be deemed to have been breached if the programmes of some parties/candidates are aired at less favourable times than those of others.
- (v) Direct access slots should be made available by the private media on equitable financial terms for all parties/candidates.
- (vi) State media should provide all parties/candidates a reasonable amount of time.
- (vii) Parties /candidates may purchase airtime/space for political advertisements and they should have access to such time/space in a transparent manner.

**c. Special information programmes and voter access**

- (i) During elections, the media should endeavor to provide special information programmes that provide an opportunity to general public to put questions directly to party leaders and candidates, and for candidates to debate with each other on policy matters and issues that are of great concern to the electorate.
- (ii) Attempt to air special information programmes regarding policy matters and the issues of public importance should be aired during prime viewing or listening hours.
- (iii) Contesting candidates and office bearer of any political party should not act as anchors or presenters during the election period.
- (iv) Broadcasters and publishers have greater editorial discretion in relation to such content than the news but such discretion is subject to the general obligation of balance and impartiality.

**d. Voter education programmes**

- (i) State media are obliged to broadcast voter education programmes, at least to the extent that this is not already sufficiently covered by other information initiatives.
- (ii) Private media should also endeavor to introduce such programmes as a matter of public service.
- (iii) Voter education programmes must reflect accuracy and impartiality and must attempt effectively to inform voters about the voting process, including how, when and where to vote, the secrecy of the ballot, the importance of voting and similar matters.
- (iv) These programmes should reach the greatest number of voters through programmes in regional languages and also targeting marginalized groups such as women, the under-privileged, religious and ethnic minorities.

**e. Opinion polls and election projections**

- (i) Media should strive to report the results of opinion polls in a fair and proper context explaining the scope and limits of such polls that have their own peculiar limitations.
- (ii) Opinion polls should be accompanied by information to assist viewers/listeners to understand the poll's significance, such as:
  - (a) who conducted, commissioned and paid for the poll;

- (b) the methodology used;
- (c) the sample size;
- (d) the margin of error;
- (e) the fieldwork dates; and
- (f) the data used.

**f. Corrections and replies**

- (i) Any candidate/party which has been defamed or is a victim of gross misrepresentation or other illegal injury by broadcast of information should be entitled to a correction and where appropriate granted an opportunity to reply.

**g. Coverage at the polling station and announcement of results**

- (i) The accredited media persons shall be allowed to enter a polling station along with camera for making footage of the voting process or counting process only for onetime. However, they shall not make footage of the screened off compartment to maintain the secrecy of ballot.
- (ii) The media shall not air any unofficial result of a polling station until one hour is passed after the close of poll.
- (iii) Broadcasters will not air any final, formal and definite election results and / or they will be aired only with clear disclaimer that they are unofficial, incomplete and fractional results, which should not be taken as final results until Election Commission has announced final results.

**D. REGULATORY AND COMPLAINTS MECHANISM**

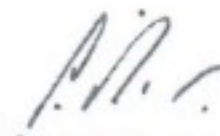
**a. Prohibition of attacks against media personnel and property**

- (i) The acts of violence, intimidation or harassment directed against media personnel or premises of media outlets shall be strictly prohibited.
- (ii) The authorities should make special efforts to investigate all acts of violence, intimidation or harassment directed against media personnel or the property or premises of a media outlet and to bring those responsible to justice, particularly where the act was motivated by an intent to interfere with media freedom.

**b. Complaint Committee**

- (i) A Complaint Committee shall be constituted by the Election Commission with the mandate to regulate the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Media by all concerned.
- (ii) The Complaint Committee will be headed by Additional Director General (PR), ECP and will comprise of representatives from PEMRA, PBA, APNS, PCP, CPNE, PTV, PBC, NPC and PFUJ.

By Order of the Election Commission of Pakistan.

  
(Ch. Nadeem Qasim)  
Additional Director General (PR)