15th

NATIONAL
MEDIA WORKSHOP
4-8 AUG, 2025

INFORMATION - MEDIA - PERCEPTION - POWER

Post Workshop Report

ISSRA
INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

15th National Media Workshop (NMW)

Institute for Strategic Studies Research & Analysis (ISSRA), National Defence University (NDU) organized 15th National Media Workshop under the overarching theme "Information - Media - Perception - Power" from 4 to 8 Aug 2025. The Workshop was aimed to enhance awareness of participants about media's role in contemporary era.

The workshop was attended by 73 participants including personnel from Electronic , Print , Digital / Web Media, Foreign Correspondents, Academia, Government officials and Civil Society. The purpose of the workshop was to exchange ideas and develop understanding of the dynamics of contemporary media and its ability to influence the public opinion.

Table of Contents

CONTENTS

Welcome Address by
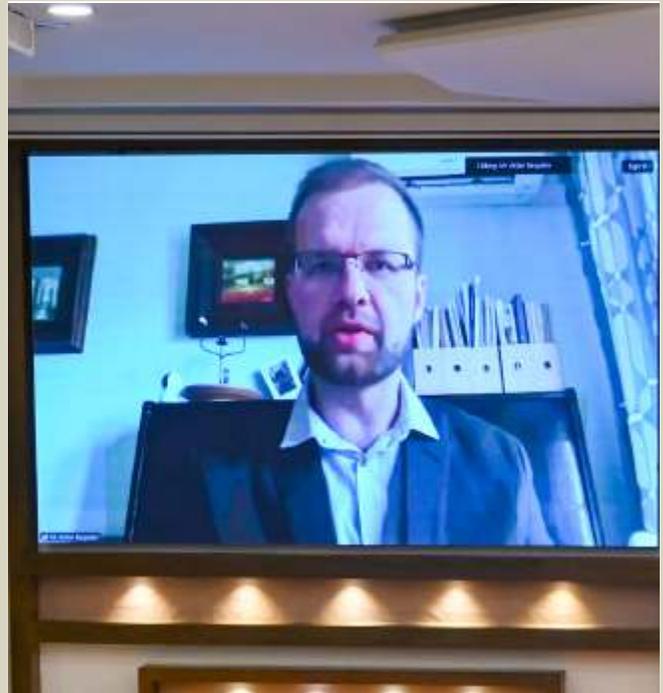**MAJ GEN MUHAMMAD RAZA AIZAD, HI (M)**
DG ISSRA

DAY 1

4 August, 2025
Session I

Navigating Uncertainty: Trends Reshaping the Global Strategic Landscape

SPEAKERS

Distinguished Visiting Fellow
Mushahid Hussain Syed

SPEAKER - I
Mr Anton Bespalov

SPEAKER - II
Amb Anne W Patterson

SPEAKER - III
Mr Victor Gao

SPEAKER - IV
Mr Ejaz Haider

MODERATOR
Ms Shah Bano

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The global strategic landscape is increasingly shaped by uncertainty, mainly influenced by the evolving US approach to international affairs.
- US President Donald Trump's foreign policy is significantly different from that of his predecessors, characterised as transactional, unpredictable, and often guided by personal relationships with world leaders.
- US-China relations are one of the most critical fault lines, as tensions have disrupted the international trading system and intensified strategic rivalry.
- China continues to be seen as the greatest long-term threat to US global influence, shaping most of Washington's strategic planning.
- US relationships with allies and competitors alike are being reassessed, with significant implications for global security, trade, and multilateral cooperation.
- Russia interprets the evolution of the global order through historical turning points, particularly the end of the Cold War in 1989-991, when Soviet leadership collapsed, and the West proclaimed a "new world order."
- For Russia, the late 20th century revealed two critical lessons: the unprecedented economic rise of Asia, and the limits of ideological confrontation as a sustainable model of power.
- Unlike the West, which continues to rely on rigid alliances, Russia views the future global order as less defined by regional security blocs and more by flexible economic partnerships.
- BRICS, despite being a loose association, represents a viable alternative platform for economic cooperation and a counterbalance to Western-dominated institutions.
- In global politics, despite differences in economic size and population, Russia must be recognised as an equal partner, and constructive engagement with Russia is vital for both international and European security.
- China emphasises that all civilisations must be treated equally; cultural and religious identities, including the Muslim civilisation, should be respected globally.
- China advocates for an open-source approach to AI development, ensuring it benefits all of humanity; in contrast, the US prefers a closed-source AI model, driven by intelligence and security concerns.
- US-Pakistan relations remain strategically important but are currently characterised by uncertainty, reflecting shifting priorities in Washington.
- China and Pakistan maintain a strong strategic alignment with deep cooperation in security and development. Ties with Russia are positive but constrained by limited economic relations, hindering deeper collaboration.

DAY 1

4 August, 2025
Session II

South Asia at Crossroads: Pathways for Regional Dialogue, Integration, and Maritime Security

Distinguished Visiting Fellow
Mushahid Hussain Syed

SPEAKER - I
Amb Abdul Basit

SPEAKER - II
Amb Asif Ali Khan Durrani

SPEAKER - III
Dr Maria Sultan

MODERATOR
Ms Maryam Zia

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- South Asia stands at a crossroads, where entrenched conflict and prospects for regional integration intersect; strategic clarity and media narratives will shape whether the region moves toward cooperation or rivalry.

- South Asia is undergoing a strategic realignment, marked by China's deeper involvement, shifting US policies, and India's diplomatic setbacks.

- Pakistan-India bilateral ties remain frozen, while SAARC is dormant; yet, opportunities exist through maritime development and emerging alignments with Western neighbours.

- SAARC's dysfunction, rooted in the India-Pakistan hostility that has persisted since 2014, has stalled regional integration. Sub-regional initiatives, such as Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran cooperation, offer potential alternatives to SAARC's paralysis.

- Bilateralism between Pakistan and India is seen as "dead" after India's actions in Jammu & Kashmir and the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty following the Pahalgam incident, underscoring South Asia's tendency to fix blame rather than solve problems.

- The maritime domain is a decisive factor in global trade, with the Indian Ocean serving as the transit route for nearly 90% of the world's oil trade.

- Pakistan needs to pursue a clear cut Kashmir strategy, given the favorable opportunities emerging in the current regional and global environment.

- Pakistan's western frontier presents a complex mix of challenges and opportunities, marked by enduring tribal linkages with Afghanistan and Baloch ties with Iran. Persistent concerns centre on regional militancy which is rooted in local grievances as well as driven by external influence.

- South Asia is undergoing a period of political realignment, marked by China's emergence as a key factor in regional strategy, shifting US policies, and India's recent diplomatic setbacks.

- To address these evolving challenges, Pakistan must pursue strategic clarity, strengthen its maritime posture, and enhance its ability to shape regional discourse, thereby safeguarding its interests and bolstering its influence.

DAY 2

5 August, 2025
Session I

Crafting Realities: The Art and Science of Narrative Building in the 21st Century

SPEAKERS

SPEAKER - I
Ms Sophia Saifi

SPEAKER - II
Ms Maria Zeleranskaya

SPEAKER - III
Mr Habib Ullah Khan

SPEAKER - IV
Syeda Nasim Zehra

MODERATOR
Ms Zunaira Azhar

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The media landscape is constantly evolving: from a time when only state television existed, to the rise of international broadcasters, and now to the influence of individual content creators and social media influencers.
- Journalism extends beyond breaking or hard news. It is a broader concept that encompasses analysis, context, and storytelling.
- Independent journalism remains vital in polarised societies, but it must anchor itself in objectivity to maintain credibility.
- Trust is the cornerstone of journalism; it takes time to earn, yet it remains a journalist's most powerful asset.
- Narrative-building is the responsibility of the organisation disseminating information, not the journalist.
- Audiences today demand multiple perspectives, enabling them to judge issues on their own terms.
- Building on the growing demand for diverse perspectives and credible narratives, RT was founded on the idea that the world needed to hear Russia's voice and provide an open space for alternative viewpoints, countering one-dimensional Western narratives.
- Information now moves at the "speed of thought," and Pakistan has made significant strides in the information domain over the past decade.
- India systematically spreads disinformation, frequently targeting neighbouring states such as Pakistan.
- Google's concept of the "Zero Moment of Truth" underscores the power of first impressions online; what appears in your first search result can shape perceptions instantly.
- Digital media offers instant access to news, yet legacy media maintains a cyclical relevance, proving it is far from obsolete.
- Social media's inherently divisive and polarising nature challenges societal cohesion; while it cannot be eliminated, its impact must be approached with awareness.
- Neutrality and objectivity are not the same: neutrality avoids taking a stand, while objectivity is rooted in truth and guided by evidence.

DAY2

5 August, 2025
Session II

News Media Landscape of Pakistan - Opportunities, Challenges & the Road Ahead

SPEAKERS

SPEAKER - I
Mr Iftikhar Firdous

SPEAKER - II
Mr Fahad Hussain

SPEAKER - III
Dr Haroon Elahi Toor

SPEAKER - IV
Mir Ibrahim Rahman

MODERATOR
Ms Sumera Khan

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Non-traditional platforms, including those exploited by extremist groups, are accessible to larger audiences; operating without editorial filters, they are highly susceptible to misinformation and disinformation.

- Expanding digital penetration creates avenues for outreach and risks from state, interstate, and non-state surveillance. Strengthening credible local platforms and partnering with international platforms is essential to counter false narratives.

- Mainstream electronic media is losing younger audiences, particularly Gen Z, who find traditional content outdated and unrelatable. Despite this decline, television remains a significant source of viewership in rural and semi-urban areas.

- Key issues include falling revenues and reliance on advertising, lack of perceived editorial independence, and difficulty competing with free, on-demand digital content.

- The media's role is to tell the truth, not merely to speak positively of the state. Recognising editorial biases openly and adhering to ethical codes can help restore trust.

- Diversifying content formats, embracing data-driven journalism, and delivering trusted, fact-checked reporting can help regain public confidence. Editorial filters can become strengths if reinforced with clear ethical codes.

- Media plays a decisive role in shaping domestic, regional, and international perceptions of Pakistan. Inconsistent messaging, particularly on Kashmir, undermines credibility and weakens Pakistan's diplomatic case.

- Sensitive areas, such as Balochistan, remain underreported due to political constraints, safety concerns, and a lack of investment in unbiased local reporting. While the narrative battle increasingly occurs on digital platforms, television provides minimal airtime to these regions.

- Public broadcasters must focus on neglected topics such as health, agriculture, etc and peripheral regions, despite financial and technological constraints. Private channels must strike a balance between commercial pressures and their duty to report on sensitive issues responsibly.

- The absence of a Pakistan-based English-language news channel limits the country's ability to shape global narratives.

- Media must prioritise truth over state praise, acknowledge inevitable pressures, and maintain transparency about biases, serving as an impartial arena for public discourse and providing an even field for discussion without taking sides.

DAY2

5 August, 2025
Session III

Talk by MoS for Finance & Revenue

SPEAKER

SPEAKER
Mr Bilal Azhar Kayani

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A significant knowledge gap exists among media professionals regarding Pakistan's economic and financial realities.
- Fiscal sustainability has become a long-standing national challenge that no government has been able to manage effectively.
- Pakistan's dependence on IMF support underscores the pressing need to stabilise its foreign reserves and maintain its standing in global trade and financial markets.
- Planned reforms, including the privatisation of PIA and power companies, aim to attract investors and strengthen economic fundamentals.
- The assumption that default would spare ordinary citizens is dangerously false. Defaults trigger currency collapse, inflation surges, market isolation, and severe hardship for the public.
- Pakistan is making progress in digitalisation, not only in retail but also in manufacturing, through the use of integrated computer systems and intelligent surveillance. However, further efforts are needed to ensure that businesses pay their fair share of taxes.
- Transitioning to a cashless economy is crucial for enhanced money tracing and tax collection, creating a mutually beneficial situation for both citizens and the government.
- Inflation, although common globally, must be reduced to single digits without restricting people's purchasing power - a balance that strong economies typically maintain.
- The government's role should be regulatory rather than controlling to ensure fair market practices.
- Foreign investment is declining sharply, falling from $172 million in February 2024 to $94.7 million in February 2025 (a 45% drop). Reviving investment requires boosting exports and attracting capital into the energy, minerals, and IT sectors.
- For the first time, tax policy will be formulated by the Finance Ministry rather than the FBR; a reform aimed at improving transparency, aligning with global best practices, and creating a more predictable environment for investment and compliance.

DAY 3
6 August, 2025
Session I

Ethics, Accountability, and Regulation: Strengthening Media Integrity in the Digital Age

SPEAKERS

SPEAKER - I
Mr Wakeel Khan

SPEAKER - II
Mr Waqar Uddin Syed

SPEAKER - III
**Brig Amer Shahzad (Retd)**

MODERATOR
Ms Aniqa Nisar

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), established in 2002, was mandated to regulate private electronic media, focusing on improving the standards of information, education, and entertainment.
- PEMRA plays a central role in ensuring the dissemination of authentic news, fair ratings, and ethical broadcast practices.
- Its functions extend to licensing, monitoring, and distribution of foreign TV channels, creating regulations, and registering companies for Television Audience Measurement (TAM) services.
- The National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) was established under the Ministry of Interior in 2005, with jurisdiction over cyber-related offences across Pakistan.
- The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) provides the legal basis for prosecuting cybercrimes, addressing issues such as online fraud, hacking, harassment, and the dissemination of child abuse content.
- Pakistan has established 15 cybercrime police stations and 13 digital forensic labs nationwide to strengthen enforcement and digital accountability.
- Pakistan's telecom sector has experienced rapid growth, with over 200 million subscribers, 150 million broadband users, and a broadband penetration rate of 60%, despite facing socioeconomic challenges.
- The country has a robust infrastructure, comprising over 2,200 licenses, 75,000 km of long-haul fibre, 135,000 km of metropolitan fibre, 58,000 cell sites, and seven submarine cables, with three more on the way.
- A Telecom Security Operations Centre (Anti-CERT/Anti-SOC) enables cyber threat monitoring, reporting, audits, and collaboration with international partners to safeguard networks.
- PTA's role in content regulation is limited to blocking or removing unlawful material reported by relevant agencies, as it is not an investigative authority.
- Pakistan is among the world's top three freelancing hubs, with around three million freelancers earning $400 million annually. However, earnings remain low ($4/hour compared to the global average of $28) and female participation is limited to 21%.
- Oversight of digital and telecom regulation is shared among the Ministry of IT & Telecom, the Ministry of Interior (with FIA), the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, SECP, and other institutions responsible for ICT, media, and cybersecurity policies.
- The rise of cybercrimes, including WhatsApp hacking and the circulation of exploitative content, underscores the need for stricter digital monitoring and public awareness.
- Ensuring ethical media practices in the era of social media and rapid information dissemination requires striking a balance between freedom of expression and accountability.

DAY 3

6 August, 2025
Session II

Pakistan's Soft Power Frontier: Culture, Connectivity, and Strategic Narrative
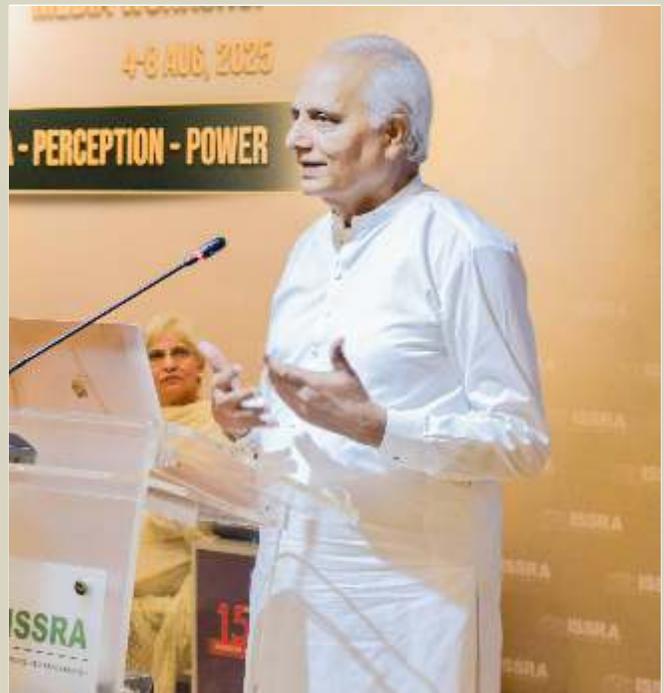
SPEAKERS

Distinguished Visiting Fellow
Mr Shahid Nadeem

SPEAKER - I
Ms Fiza Ali

SPEAKER - II
Mr Sarmad Khoosat

SPEAKER - III
Mr Arieb Azhar

SPEAKER - IV
Dr Najeeba Arif

MODERATOR
Ms Marium Fatima

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Art and literature quietly shape society's soul, embodying soft power that grows organically. They create spaces for reflection, creativity, and dialogue, guiding young people away from radicalisation toward a culture of ideas, stories, and shared understanding.

- Media is built on three core elements: the microphone, the screen, and the pen. Those who hold these tools possess significant power to influence society, making media not just a medium of expression but also a profound responsibility for shaping narratives and Pakistan's image.

- Pakistan's connectivity culture is deeply enriched by its geographical and linguistic diversity. This diversity, when embraced through music, narratives, and the performing arts, becomes a powerful bridge for fostering tolerance, understanding, and unity.

- Pakistan's struggle to progress is rooted in a lingering colonial mindset, which continues to hold back its cultural and creative potential. By overcoming this colonial hangover and fully embracing the true essence of our own culture, Pakistan can begin to harness soft power in its most authentic form.

- Classical art and heritage require protection from market exploitation, with adequate funding and recognition of their societal value; the government must actively promote and protect them.

- Increasing capitalist pressures have distanced societies from these fundamental human needs; yet, in a globalised world, storytelling and soft power remain vital tools for competing, engaging, and thriving on one's own terms.

- As a powerful force for change, discourse shaping demands patience, skill, and responsibility. It must be nurtured with strategies that strike a balance between the need to avoid excessive censorship and prevent unchecked freedom.

- Since content can spread both truth and misinformation, robust mechanisms are essential to ensure narratives remain authentic, credible, and constructive.

- Strong research and a clear cultural policy are essential to create strong cultural expression that is both meaningful and impactful.

DAY 4

6 August, 2025
Session I

Disrupted Realities: Emerging Trends Shaping the Future of Media

SPEAKERS

SPEAKER - I
Ms Kanwal Cheema

SPEAKER - II
Ms Tanya Goudsouzian

SPEAKER - III
Syed Talat Hussain

SPEAKER - IV
Brig Waqar Hasan Khan (Retd)

MODERATOR
Ms Naila Shuja

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The global media landscape has shifted from centralised gatekeepers to a fragmented "fifth estate" comprising influencers, bloggers, whistleblowers, and AI-generated content, thereby reducing credibility and accountability.
- Global print circulation has fallen by nearly 50% over the past decade, with single-year declines of over 12% in some markets. Advertising revenues are expected to fall sharply, undermining financial sustainability.
- Traditional outlets must adapt by embracing AI-driven content, personalisation, and subscription-based models, or risk becoming extinct.
- The media should be recognised as an autonomous institution that safeguards accountability, rather than being treated as a constituent pillar of the state.
- Credibility today is often driven less by objective facts and more by partisanship, with audiences seeking validation of their views.
- Social media acts as both a game-changer and a double-edged sword, capable of unifying people during crises but equally powerful in spreading disinformation and fueling polarisation.
- Pakistan's youthful demographics and mobile penetration were identified as drivers of exponential growth in social media platforms. However, echo chambers, emotional biases, and the weaponisation of disinformation remain pressing challenges.
- AI is transforming media into a "weaponised persuasion system," with algorithms, deep fakes, and synthetic media blurring truth, enabling propaganda, and creating "hallucinogenic loops" of self-reinforcing distortions.
- Whoever controls AI infrastructure will control future narratives, making regulation, anticipatory leadership, and youth training in generative AI vital as conflicts shift from weapons to battles for hearts and minds.
- Fact-checking, media literacy, and digital forensics are vital in combating deep fakes, as media now actively shape political, cultural, and psychological realities.
- Opportunities exist in strengthening fact-checking mechanisms, building South–South media partnerships, developing hybrid models that are scalable to local contexts, and investing in digital skills and critical thinking among youth, all of which are vital to counter misinformation.
- Sensationalism, unchecked ownership, and "digital colonialism" from global north platforms undermine local voices.
- Journalists need multidisciplinary skills in editing, AI, and digital production to remain competitive, while young people must be trained in AI to secure narrative sovereignty.

DAY 5

5 August, 2025
Session II

Talk by Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting

SPEAKER

SPEAKER
Mr. Attaullah Tarar

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The rise of electronic media brought unprecedented influence, creating an urgent need for regulatory checks and balances to ensure that its reach is exercised responsibly.

- Freedom of the media, though important, is not absolute; it must operate within reasonable limits to safeguard national security, public order, and collective interests.

- Digital media emerged as a distinct domain of influence, independent of the evolutionary path of electronic media, with its unique dynamics and challenges.

- Misinformation and disinformation were identified as the most significant challenges of the digital era, necessitating coordinated efforts among states, institutions, and societies to counter them effectively.

- The need for stronger online harassment and cyber laws was emphasised to protect vulnerable groups, particularly women and minorities, from digital abuse and targeted attacks.

- Media plays a vital role in nation-building, especially in portraying Pakistan's positive contributions and countering negative stereotypes on the global stage.

- Pakistan must invest in nurturing digital artists, creators, and content producers to strengthen its international soft image, drawing lessons from China's success in projecting influence through creative industries.

- Recent government initiatives to expand English-language media reflect efforts to broaden Pakistan's outreach, shape international opinion, and communicate its stance more effectively to global audiences.

- Constructive criticism of the government is healthy for democracy; however, deliberate attacks on state institutions are harmful as they serve personal interests and adversarial narratives, and thus will not be allowed.

- Harmful speech that incites violence, hatred, or misinformation cannot be justified under the principle of freedom of expression, underscoring the importance of regulation.

- During the military escalation with India, Pakistan projected a unified and consistent narrative internationally, which enhanced its credibility and strengthened its diplomatic positioning.

- In the aftermath of the escalation, Pakistan dismantled the "rising India" myth by exposing its military shortcomings and highlighting internal dissent, weakening India's image as the "world's largest democracy."

- Gen Z's creative use of memes and humour in online "meme wars" has become a powerful tool in shaping perceptions, allowing Pakistani youth to dominate the digital narrative.

VISIT - NDMA

VISIT - MURREE

CERTIFICATE AWARD CEREMONY

LIGHTER MOMENTS