IN THE SUPREME COURT OF PAKISTAN

Present:

Mr. Justice Qazi Faez Isa

Mr. Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan

Mr. Justice Shahid Waheed

Suo Moto Case No. 4 of 2022

[Regarding grant of Additional 20 Marks to Hafiz-e-Quran while admission in MBBS/BDS Degree under Regulation 9 (9) of the MBBS and BDS (Admissions, House Job and Internship) Regulations, 2018]

In Attendance:

For PMDC : Mr. Afnan Karim Kundi, ASC.

On Court Notice : Mr. Shehzad Atta Elahi,

Attorney-General for Pakistan with

Raja M. Shafqat Abbasi, DAG.

Malik Naeem Igbal, ASC.

(Amicus Curiae)

Date of Hearing:

15.03.2023.

ORDER

- 1. The Supreme Court Rules, 1980¹ ('the Rules') neither permit nor envisage special benches.² However, a Special Bench comprising of three Judges³ was constituted to hear this case, and the hearing fixed for 1 pm, that is, towards the end of the scheduled court-time. The three Judges comprising of this Special Bench were taken from three different Benches.⁴ The question arises, why couldn't an existing regular Bench hear this case? The record does not disclose the reason for the constitution of this Special Bench, nor do we know.
- 2. The Rules were recently considered with regard to the Constitution of Benches, and it was held⁵, that:

Order XI is titled 'Constitution of Benches' and stipulates that every case shall be heard by 'Judges to be nominated by the Chief Justice' and enables the Chief Justice to refer any case 'to a larger Bench' and if in any case the Judges 'are equally divided in opinion' then to place the case for hearing 'either before another Judge or before a larger Bench to be nominated by the Chief Justice'. This is the extent to which the Rules provide for the nomination of Judges on the Bench. The Rules do not grant any power to the Registrar or to the Chief Justice to change the judge or judges on a Bench or to reduce their number.

¹ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, article 191.

² Supreme Court Rules, 1980, Order XI.

³ Qazi Faez Isa, Amin-ud-Din Khan and Shahid Waheed, JJ.

⁴ Bench-II, Bench-III and Bench-IV.

⁵ Civil Petition No. 3380 of 2020, order dated 1 March 2023.

- The matter placed before us was taken notice of fourteen months 3. ago.6 Regulation 9(9) of the 'MBBS and BDS (Admissions, House Job and Internship) Regulations, 2018' stipulated that an 'addition of twenty marks to his marks obtained in HSSC or, as the case may be, F.Sc./Equivalent, provided he/she passes Hifz-e-Quran test' be given to those seeking admission to MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery) and BDS (Bachelor of Dental Surgery). The question arose, whether the said regulation treated all citizens of Pakistan alike and conformed to Article 25 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan ('the Constitution') and whether the memorization (hifz) of the Holy Qur'an would make for a better doctor or dentist. Another question is, whether hifz of the Holy Qur'an is undertaken for the blessings and reward of Almighty Allah or whether a temporal advantage can also be gained, that is, to secure admission, and whether this would accord with the Injunctions of Islam.7
- 4. The aforesaid queries may elicit strong views, and emotions too. Therefore, it is all the more important that it be ensured that no opportunity is provided to doubt the adjudication process due to lack of clarity and transparency. Constituting a *Special Bench* provides detractors an opportunity to allege that the bench was tailor-made to give a particular decision. For a decision to be credible, and acceptable, there must be an established adjudication process. If an identifiable, transparent, and delineated mechanism for the fixation of cases and for constitution of benches is not in place, and cases filed earlier are leapfrogged by latter ones, public confidence in the Judiciary erodes.
- 5. In the absence of an established procedure for hearing cases, they should be queued and heard on a *first-in-first-out* basis, which will avoid misgivings and mistrust. If the same category of cases are heard *out-of-turn*, and this is done for no discernible reason, then it could be alleged that personal preference is the determinative factor. The instant case took fourteen months to be fixed in court for hearing, while the same category of cases⁸ filed or taken notice of later were fixed for hearing much before this case was fixed for hearing.
- 6. To expedite or defer the hearing of a case for no valid reason, in itself constitutes a decision of sorts; only cases which are fixed for

⁶ Civil Petition No. 397-K of 2020, order dated 10 January 2022.

⁷ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, article 227(1).

⁸ Ibid., article 184(3) cases.

hearing can be decided. To maintain the public's confidence, the process of case fixation must be predetermined, fair and impartial, and this must be evident.

- 7. Perceptions are important Justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done. To maintain public confidence, trustworthiness must be ingrained in the judicial process. On the foundation of trust⁹ is raised the judicial edifice. And, trust is not merely an expression of goodwill. It is mandated by a number of constitutional provisions. Everyone has to 'be treated in accordance with law'. And, 'All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.' The Constitution does not permit discrimination. Exceptionalism too has no place in the Constitution.
- 8. The Constitution also mandates *due process*¹³ which means conformity with established rules and principles for the enforcement and protection of rights in the system of jurisprudence. This Court¹⁴ has held that:
 - 24. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan ('Constitution') is the fountainhead of the rule of law in Pakistan. 'To enjoy the protection of law and to be treated in accordance with law is the inalienable right of every citizen.' The rule of law constitutes the bedrock of governance. When the law stipulates that something has to be done in a particular manner that is how it should be done. And any person who exercises authority must do so in accordance with law. The right to be treated in accordance with law was invigorated and bolstered when the Constitution was amended to provide an additional Fundamental Right by adding Article 10A to the Constitution stipulating that, 'For the determination of his civil rights and obligations or in any criminal charge against him a person shall be entitled to a fair trial and due process.' The due process requirement must be met in the determination of rights and obligations. The Constitution does not define due process. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to limit its scope by defining it. But this does not mean that the due process requirement is a meaningless concept. Rather due process incorporates universally accepted standards of justice and is not dependent upon any law or laws. It is an all encompassing expression which may not be curtailed with reference to particular laws. Due process is to be understood holistically by keeping in mind the entire Constitution, which excludes arbitrary power, authoritarianism and autocratic rule.

⁹ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Preamble and Objectives Resolution, which article 2A has made into a 'substantive part of the Constitution and shall have effect accordingly.'

¹⁰ Ibid., article 4(1).

¹¹ Ibid., article 25(1).

¹² Ibid., article 25, only women and children can receive preferential treatment.

¹³ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, article 10A.

¹⁴ Federation of Pakistan v E-Movers (Pvt.) Limited, 2022 SCMR 1021, pp. 1046-7.

- 9. Citizens of Pakistan hold members of the Legislative bodies to account when elections are held. The Executive (bureaucracy) has to abide by the policies set by the government and with the laws governing them. However, the Judiciary is not similarly accountable. An individual Judge alone can be proceeded against, by the Supreme Judicial Council, if incapable of properly performing the duties of his office by reason of physical or mental incapacity or when he/she may have been guilty of misconduct, 15 but not the Judiciary.
- The Judiciary would be flawed if it is not open to constructive criticism. The Judiciary exists to serve the people and should embrace observations, opinions, and critique as it also serves as a check on its own functioning. The people's feedback also helps identify shortcomings, which can thereafter be addressed. Constructive criticism serves the interest of the Judiciary as it helps improve its performance. The relationship between the litigant, who is the service-user, and the Judiciary, which is the service-provider, should be collaborative, with the common goal of improving the service. Forbidding criticism neither serves the interest of the people nor of the Judiciary.
- During the course of the proceedings our attention was drawn to a 'Prohibition Order'16 issued by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority ('PEMRA') through which 'All Satellite TV Channel Licencees' were forbidden to telecast anything 'against state institutions' and not to discuss the 'conduct of the Hon'ble sitting judges of High Court and Supreme Court, in any manner.'
- The Constitution grants every citizen the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression and guarantees the freedom of the press. 17 If legitimate criticism of Judges is prohibited it neither serves the interest of the Judiciary nor that of the public. Prohibiting the 'broadcast/rebroadcast of any content pertaining to conduct'18 of Judges of the High Court and the Supreme Court is inexplicable. It is not disclosed why PEMRA issued this gagging order.
- The Prohibition Order is stated to have been issued with the 'approval of the Chairman, PEMRA' raising the question, why could the Chairman himself not have issued it? Did the Chairman consider it a mundane and insignificant matter not worthy of his time?

¹⁵ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, article 209(5).

¹⁶ Bearing number F.No.3(07)/2023/OPS-BM/4419, dated 9 March 2023, attachment 'A'.

¹⁷ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, article 19.

¹⁸ Emphasis added.

- 14. The Chairman of PEMRA, alone, does not constitute PEMRA. The law which established and governs PEMRA states that, 'All orders, determinations and decisions of the Authority [PEMRA] shall be taken in writing and shall identify the determination of the Chairman and each member separately.' PEMRA comprises of the 'Chairman and twelve members'. However, the Prohibition Order does not disclose if the members had any say in the matter, let alone whether a meeting of the members took place, how many attended it and their determinations. This lack of disclosure by a statutory-regulatory body is of concern.
- 15. The *Prohibition Order* purports to rely on a judgment of this Court²¹ to justify its issuance, however, the referenced judgment neither directed PEMRA to issue this type of gagging order nor did it suggest this. The *Prohibition Order* was purportedly issued to prevent superior court Judges' conduct being discussed, however, District/Session Judiciaries hear and decide far more cases, and are more vulnerable, but PEMRA considered them unworthy to be given the same protection. PEMRA's unsolicited media-gagging order brings the Judiciary into disrespect and disrepute as citizens will assume that it has been issued on the direction of Judges, with a view to cover discrepancies, illegalities and/or blemishes. Throttling the media violates the Constitution and is unacceptable.
- 16. The *Prohibition Order* mentions a constitutional provision²² which isn't applicable to the media. And in mentioning *state institutions*, it substitutes meaningful content with magniloquence, which signifies nothing. PEMRA is a statutory body and one expects that its orders would use constitutional and legal terminology. *State institutions* are neither mentioned in the Constitution nor in PEMRA's law.²³ Institutions which are funded by the public may be referred to as *public institutions*, acknowledging the public's ownership, and that they serve the public. When the phrase *public institution* is substituted with *state institution*, it is not inconsequential phraseology; as the public's ownership of the institution is severed and renders it unaccountable.

¹⁹ Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority Ordinance, 2002, section 8(5).

²⁰ Ibid., section 6.

²¹ Suo Motu Case No. 28 of 2018, PLD 2019 Supreme Court 1.

²² Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, article 68.

²³ Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority Ordinance, 2002.

- 17. The *Prohibition Order* disregards and violates the Fundamental Rights of freedom of speech, expression, and of the media.²⁴ The Constitution also guarantees that, 'Every citizen shall have the right to have access to information in all matters of public importance.'²⁵ And, PEMRA forgets that 'Obedience to the Constitution and the law is the inviolable obligation of every citizen.'²⁶ Fundamental Rights must remain inviolate, and when they are attacked the courts have to safeguard them.
- 18. We are compelled to remind PEMRA that it was set up (amongst other things) to 'ensure accountability, transparency and good governance by optimizing the free flow of information.'27 However, the Prohibition Order does the very opposite by imposing absolute censorship and threatening violators with punitive action. Stopping the free flow of information prevents accountability, transparency and good governance.
- 19. The Constitution stipulates that 'all existing laws' must conform 'with the Injunctions of Islam' and that 'no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to such Injunctions'. ²⁸ Islam²⁹ does not prohibit the criticism of Judges. Believers must speak the truth. ³⁰ Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) taught that the highest form of jihad (struggle) is to speak up against an oppressor, ³¹ and if despite seeing wrongdoing people do nothing, then they too will be punished. ³²
- 20. The Islamic tradition records that judges were criticised. The founder³³ of the Sunni Hanafi school of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) was often critical of judges (*qadis*).³⁴ To placate Abu Hanifa and stop him criticizing judges, Caliph al-Mansur created the higher post of Chief Justice (*Qadi al-Quda*³⁵) and offered it to him, but he refused it, saying that he was not fit to hold the position. The Caliph was incensed, had him imprisoned and tortured; Abu Hanifa died in prison but refused to accept the office.

²⁴ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, article 19.

²⁶ Ibid., article 5(2).

²⁵ Ibid., article 19A.

²⁷ Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority Ordinance, 2002, Preamble (iv).

²⁸ The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, article 227(1). ²⁹ Ibid., article 2 - 'Islam shall be the State religion of Pakistan.'

وَقُولُواْ قَوْلاً سَدِيدًا – 30 Al-Qur'an, surah Al-Ahzab (33) verse ما ما المامة ال

³¹ Sunan Abi Dawud, Chapter on Strife, Hadith No. 4344, narrated by Abu Said al-Khudri – اَفْضَلُ الْجِهَادِ كَلِمَهُ عَدْلٍ عِنْدُ سُلطانِ جَائِرٍ.

مستور بحير أَنُّ النَّاسَ إِذَا رَأُوا الظَّلْمَ فَلَمْ يَأَخُذُوا عَلَى يَتَدِيهُ أُوشِكَ أَنْ يَعُمَّهُمُ اللهُ بِعِقَابِ مِنْ النَّاسَ إِذَا رَأُوا الظَّلْمَ فَلَمْ يَأْخُذُوا عَلَى يَتَدِيهُ أُوشِكَ أَنْ يَعُمَّهُمُ اللهُ بِعِقَاب

³³ Imam Abu Hanifa (Nu'man ibn Thabit ibn Zuta ibn Marzuban) (80-150 H / 699-797 CE).

³⁴ For example, 'Disagreements of Abu Hanifa and Ibn Abi Layla' by Abu Yusuf (111-182 H / 729-798 CE) who was himself a famous Judge.

³⁵ The first time this was done.

Judges adjudicate, and at times hold others to account. Therefore, it would be constitutionally, legally, morally, and religiously indefensible to absolve Judges from accountability. Prescribing something for others but not abiding by it oneself is most offensive to Almighty Allah and He castigates hypocrites.³⁶ PEMRA's complete prohibition to criticize Judges offends the Constitution, law, morality, and Islam.

Every effort should be made to assure against the perception of 22. bias and partiality. Equality, fairness, due process, and complete impartiality must be ensured. 'The legitimacy of public institutions is crucial for building peaceful and inclusive societies.'37 Public endorsement and trust cannot be demanded. It is earned. When cases are not heard by regular benches and instead by specially constituted benches for no valid reason it 'undermines the integrity of the system, and may have serious repercussions'.38

Part VII of the Constitution is titled The Judicature and it also 23. establishes the Supreme Court and the High Courts.39 The Constitution stipulates that, 'No court shall have jurisdiction save as is or may be conferred on it by the Constitution or by or under any law.'40 And, 'Subject to the Constitution and law, the Supreme Court may make rules regulating the practice and procedure of the Court.'41

Neither the Constitution nor the Rules grant to the Chief Justice (or to the Registrar) the power to make special benches, select Judges who will be on these benches and decide the cases which they will hear. There is also no additional, incidental, ancillary, or residual power with the Chief Justice which could be used to do this. Yet, unfortunately, this is being done, and sometimes with grave repercussions. Important matters, which arose out of article 184(3) of the Constitution, were decided, with significant consequences on the economy, politics and on other aspects of the lives of Pakistanis. Incidentally, the Latin term - suo motu - does not find mention in the Constitution. A practice which is not

surah As-Saff (61) verses 2 and 3:

³⁶ Al-Qur'an, surah Al-Baqarah (2) verse 44: أَتُأْمُرُونَ ٱلنَّاسَ بِٱلْبِرُ وَتَنْسَوْنَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَنتُمْ تَتْلُونَ ٱلْكِتُّبُّ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

يَٰلَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لِمْ تَقُولُونَ مَا لَا تَغْعَلُونَ كَبُرَ مَقْتًا عِندَ ٱللَّهِ أَن تَقُولُوا مَا لَا تَغْعَلُونَ 37 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'Trust in Public Institutions', https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2021/07/trust-public-institutions/ (accessed 20 March 2023). Civil Petition No. 3380 of 2020, order dated 28 February 2023, see also Abul A'la Maudoodi v Government of West Pakistan, PLD 1964 Supreme Court 673, Al-Jehad Trust v Federation of Pakistan, PLD 1996 Supreme Court 324 and Aftab Shahban Mirani v President of Pakistan, 1998 SCMR 1863. ³⁹ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, article 175(1).

⁴⁰ Ibid., article 175(2). ⁴¹ Ibid., article 191.

sanctioned does not supplant the Constitution, no matter the duration for which it has been practiced. We⁴² must remind ourselves of the oath⁴³ that we take, which is to: (a) act in accordance with the Constitution and the law, (b) abide by the code of conduct, (c) not let personal interest influence decisions, (d) do right by all people and (e) to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution.

- 25. Judges come to develop their own expertise and understanding of the Constitution and of the law. Judges across the globe have different jurisprudential approaches, ideological leanings, and preferences. Lawyers (and litigants too) learn of the inclination of Judges and the methodologies they apply, which they accept provided the process through which benches are constituted is transparent and fair. But when benches are tailored and Judges of a particular understanding or inclination are placed together to hear a particular case, then doubts, suspicion, and misgivings arise. A decision from an adjudicatory process, which is perceived to be structured to obtain a particular decision, invariably results in severe criticism. The matter assumes criticality when objections taken on the constitution of *Special Benches*, and requests made for hearing by the Full Court, are not attended to, and no order disposing of such objections and requests is passed.
- 26. With regard to article 184(3) of the Constitution there are three categories of cases. Firstly, when a formal application seeking enforcement of Fundamental Rights is filed. Secondly, when (suo motu) notice is taken by the Supreme Court or its Judges. And, thirdly cases of immense constitutional importance and significance (which may also be those in the first and second category). Order XXV of the Rules only attends to the first category of cases. There is no procedure prescribed for the second and third category of cases. The situation is exacerbated as there is no appeal against a decision under Article 184(3) of the Constitution. The Rules also do not provide how to attend to the following matters: (a) how such cases be listed for hearing, (b) how bench/benches to hear such cases be constituted and (c) how Judges hearing them are selected.
- 27. The Supreme Court is empowered to make makes rules attending to the aforesaid matters. The Supreme Court comprises of the Chief

⁴² Chief Justice of Pakistan, Judges of the Supreme Court, Chief Justices of the High Courts, and Judges of the High Courts.

⁴³ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, articles 178 and 194, Third Schedule.

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Justice and all Judges.⁴⁴ The Constitution does not grant to the Chief Justice unilateral and arbitrary power to decide the above matters. With respect, the Chief Justice cannot substitute his personal wisdom with that of the Constitution. Collective determination by the Chief Justice and the Judges of the Supreme Court can also not be assumed by an individual, albeit the Chief Justice.

- 28. The interest of citizens therefore will be best served to postpone the hearing of this case, and of all other cases under article 184(3) of the Constitution, till the matters noted hereinabove are first attended to by making requisite rules in terms of article 191 of the Constitution.
- 29. In view of the public importance of this matter, and as it attends to citizens' fundamental rights, this order will also be translated into the National language of Pakistan,⁴⁵ which is Urdu, however, the English version will be treated as official.

Judge

As the points raised and discussed in the order were not the subject matter of the case, I disagree and will record separate discenting note.

Judge

Islamabad, 29 March 2023.

Approved for Reporting

⁴⁴ Ibid., article 176.

⁴⁵ Ibid, article 251.

Attachment 'A'.

Islamabad, the 9th March 2023

All Satellite TV Channel Licensees
(News and Current Affairs & Regional Languages Channels)

Subject:

PROHIBITION ORDER UNDER SECTION 27 OF PEMRA ORDINANCE 2002 AS AMENDED BY PEMRA (AMENDMENT) ACT 2007

Reference is invited to the directives issued by this office on 03-03-2023, 16-02-2023, 02-09-2022, 31-08-2022, 29-08-2022, 09-08-2022, 23-06-2022, 16-05-2022, 19-04-2022, 20-01-2022, 15-11-2021, 28-06-2021, wherein all the licensees were directed to refrain from telecasting any content in any manner (either recorded or produced under its banner or aired during a live speech or press talk) against state institutions.

It has been observed that despite repeated directives, satellite TV channels are persistently discussing conduct of honorable judges of superior courts and orchestrating vilification campaign through airing slanderous allegations. Whereas, airing any sort of content which prima facie refers to the conduct of the honorable judges or is against the superior judiciary is in sheer violation of Section 20 (b) (c) (d) & (f) of PEMRA Ordinance, 2002 as amended by PEMRA (Amendment) Act 2007, Rule 15(1) of PEMRA Rules, 2009, Regulation 18 1 (c) (g)(m) of PEMRA (Television Broadcast Station Operations) Regulations 2012, Clause 3 (1) (j)(l), 4(9), 4(10), 5, 17 and 22 of Electronic Media (Programmes and Advertisements) Code of Conduct 2015 read with Section 27 of PEMRA Ordinance, 2002 as amended by PEMRA (Amendment) Act 2007 and judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of Pakistan passed in Suo Moto Case No. 28 of 2018 reported as PLD 2019 Supreme Court1, PLD 2019. Notwithstanding, the conduct of judges cannot be discussed in the parliament, in this regard Article 68 of the Constitution of Pakistan is hereby reproduced for ready reference.

"No discussion shall take place in [Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament)] with respect to the conduct of any Judge of the Supreme Court or of a High Court in the discharge of his duties".

- 3. Therefore, the competent authority i.e. the Chairman PEMRA, in exercise of the powers delegated by the Authority vested in Section 27(a) of the PEMRA Ordinance 2002 as amended by PEMRA (Amendment) Act 2007, prohibits broadcast/rebroadcast of any content pertaining to conduct of the Hon'ble sitting judges of High Court and Supreme Court, in any manner, on electronic media (news bulletins, talk shows, etc.), with immediate effect.
- 4. Moreover, all satellite TV channel licensees are also directed to ensure that an effective Time Delay Mechanism be put in place and an impartial and independent Editorial Board be constituted as required under Clause 17 of

Electronic Media (Programmes and Advertisement) Code of Conduct 2015.

- 5. In case of non-compliance, the license shall be liable to be suspended under Section 30(3) of PEMRA Ordinance 2002 as amended by PEMRA (Amendment) Act 2007, without any show cause notice in the public interest along with other enabling provisions of law.
- 6. This issues with approval of the Chairman, PEMRA.

(Umair Azim) Director (Operations-Broadcast Media)

Suo Moto Case No. 4 of 2022

[Regarding grant of Additional 20 Marks to Hafiz-e-Quran while admission in MBBS/BDS Degree under Regulation 9 (9) of the MBBS and BDS (Admissions, House Job and Internship) Regulations, 2018]

ORDER OF THE COURT

This order has been passed with a majority of 2 to 1, Shahid Waheed, J, who will be writing his separate opinion, dissented.

Judge

Judge

Judge'

ISLAMABAD 29 March 2023