



EDITORIAL

FM for peace

Dawn Editorial

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At a national summit for FM radio stations held in Islamabad on Sunday, representatives of over 50 channels from across the country, including Fata, and AJK agreed upon a Radio Partnership for Peace. This is envisaged as a formal community riding the crest of the radio waves to promote peace and development. The intention is to expand the forum to cover the more than 100 FM radio stations that operate legally in the country. This is a timely and welcome move.

The ideals of inter-community harmony and tolerance need to be promoted in Pakistan's divided society through every available avenue. With audiences of FM channels continuing to increase and the coverage area constantly expanding, this idea, if implemented, can prove an important educational and awareness-raising tool. The radio is a powerful medium that has helped communities across the world. Pakistan too has seen laudable efforts by its FM channels that disseminate information on diverse topics ranging from animal husbandry to child welfare. In a more urgent context, the medium must be used to counter the wave of violence and intolerance that is sweeping across the country. For the success of the project, it is imperative that the partnership move as quickly as possible beyond the agreement and translate itself into actual programming. Providing training and technical assistance to members of the new alliance will be necessary.

Meanwhile, it must not be forgotten that the FM format has been used to spread hate propaganda and extremist ideologies. The example of Maulana Fazlullah in Swat immediately comes to mind. His illegal radio broadcasts played on the sentiments of the people of Swat who initially sided with the Taliban. And while the authorities were aware of his activities, it took a long time before the broadcasts were finally shut down. Therefore, even as FM channels play their role in promoting peace, the state too must step in and take action against illegal channels that propagate anti-state and anarchic agendas. It is child's play these days to identify the source of FM broadcasts, and there is no reason why illegal channels should not be shut down.

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