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Asia - Pakistan

Geo TV hounded

Members of Pakistani regulator try to close TV station illegally

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Reporters Without Borders is alarmed by the order issued yesterday by three members of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) closing three *Geo Television* channels – *Geo News*, *Geo Tez* and *Geo Entertainment* – and cancelling their licences.

The order was rapidly disowned by PEMRA in a [press release](#) that said it was issued following a meeting yesterday of only five PEMRA members that did not comply with [Rule 3\(4\) of PEMRA Rules 2009](#), under which at least seven of PEMRA's 12 members must attend a meeting for it to be validly convened.

The release added that the decision that PEMRA took at an earlier, valid meeting on 9 May to "refer the [*Geo Television*] case to the Ministry of Law for legal opinion" was therefore still in effect.

The case was referred to PEMRA last month by defence minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif, who [was seeking legal redress against Geo News](#) for reporting allegations that Pakistan's intelligence agencies were behind a [shooting attack on Geo News anchor Hamid Mir](#) in Karachi on 19 April.

"The hasty decision by three PEMRA members that was immediately disowned is indicative of a desire by certain government representatives to use any means, including illegal ones, to ban Geo News from broadcasting," said Benjamin Ismail, the head of the head of the Reporters Without Borders Asia-Pacific desk.

"We urge PEMRA not to yield to pressure from the intelligence agencies and the defence ministry, and to ensure that the law protects freedom of information."

Mir has been the target of repeated threats, intimidation and prosecution as a result of his coverage of the activities of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's leading intelligence agency, in the southwestern province of Baluchistan.

He shared his fears with Reporters Without Borders and his brother, Amir Mir, saying that if he was the target of any attack, "the ISI and its chief, Lt. Gen. Zaheerul Islam, should be held responsible."

After Mir's brother repeated Mir's statements on *Geo News* in the wake of the 19 April attack, the TV station was accused of broadcasting unpatriotic accusations and was the target of smear campaign in the following weeks.

The climate for employees of the *Jang/Geo* media group has deteriorated dramatically, with journalists working for *Geo News* and the newspaper *Jang* receiving repeated threats, including death threats.

A note left at the *Jang* printing press on 5 May accused *Jang* and *Geo News* employees of being "anti-Pakistan, anti-Islam, anti-Army" and threatened *Jang* with "serious consequences" if it did not close its Peshawar offices. Employees were also told to "quit and leave the traitor group immediately."

The Sunni Ittehad Council, an Islamic political party, announced on 15 May that it regarded *Geo News* as "haram" (forbidden) and called for its prohibition for broadcasting "blasphemous" content.

Pakistan is ranked 158th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).
