

18 March 2020

Mr Imran Khan
Prime Minister of Pakistan
Prime Minister House
Constitution Avenue, G-5/2,
Islamabad
Pakistan

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing on behalf of this Association and its Members in connection with the arrest last week by the National Accountability Bureau of Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman, owner, CEO and editor-in-chief of Jang Media Group and Geo TV.

The AIB and its Members are extremely concerned about the arrest of one of the most senior journalists in Pakistan for allegations relating to unproven events dating back more than 30 years. The arrest of Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman appears to be the latest in a concerted attack on the Jang Media Group and Geo TV that has been waged by the Pakistan authorities for the past few years. This has the effect of significantly impeding media freedom within Pakistan and has a chilling effect on journalism within the country.


The AIB is also concerned about attempts that have been made to reduce the access for Pakistan citizens to Geo TV channels through an unwarranted change in the channel numbers in cable electronic programme guides as well as, in some cases, the cessation of carriage of Geo TV channels by some cable operators. Our information suggests that cable companies are acting on orders of the Pakistan authorities, even though PEMRA denies it is involved. There is now a case before the Islamabad High Court that it is to be hoped will provide clarity on this issue and reinstate Geo TV's position as a prime provider of entertainment and information to Pakistan citizens.

The arrest of Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman and the restrictions on access to Geo TV channels for viewers in Pakistan are serious and worrying for the international community that supports media freedom. It seems to us that these actions have been taken in order to silence journalism in the country and to stop power being held to account.

We call for the immediate release of Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman. He is not a flight risk and it is unnecessary for him to be held on remand pending any court case.

The AIB is raising Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman's case in the 36-nation Media Freedom Coalition.

This Association and its Members look forward to a rapid resolution of this situation.

Yours sincerely,


Simon Spanswick
Chief Executive