



11 September, 2026

Sent via email

H.E. Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif
Prime Minister, Islamic Republic of Pakistan
Prime Minister's Office,
Constitution Avenue, Red Zone,
Islamabad, Pakistan

Dear Prime Minister Sharif,

We, the undersigned press freedom groups, write to express deep concern over Pakistan's rapidly deteriorating press freedom climate. In recent months, journalists in Pakistan have disappeared, faced detention and criminal investigations, been blocked from reporting in certain parts of the country, and lost jobs due to government and law enforcement agencies' pressure. These developments have further eroded the ability of Pakistani journalists to report freely and safely.

It is particularly alarming to see growing use of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016 (PECA), and investigations by the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) against journalists for reporting on matters of public interest. In addition, authorities have introduced [restrictions on reporting](#) in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, imposed [internet and telecommunications](#) blackouts, taken regulatory action against broadcasters, and imposed draconian [new guidelines](#) requiring journalists working for international media outlets to [obtain authorization](#) before reporting outside the three main cities.

Maintaining public order and national security, and preventing the spread of alleged false information, must not become open-ended grounds for suppressing public-interest reporting. We therefore urge your government to:

- **Account for journalists [Razi Tahir and Muhammad Saif](#) and ensure their swift release.** Tahir and Saif, independent journalists who publish through Tahir's popular social media channels, were seized and taken to an undisclosed location on August 1. Islamabad police have not acknowledged the journalists' detention and their whereabouts remain unknown. The circumstances of their disappearance raise serious due-process concerns and authorities must ensure the journalists have access to legal counsel and contact with their families. The government should conduct an independent investigation into the circumstances of their disappearance, hold to account all those responsible for unlawful detentions, and ensure all journalists' rights to due process are respected.

- **Ensure a prompt and transparent investigation into the June 7 attack on reporter Mian Zahid Owaisi and bring all those responsible to justice.** Around 10 armed individuals [assaulted Owaisi](#), a reporter for the Urdu-language newspaper Daily Khabarain in Bahawalpur, Punjab province, leaving him with multiple injuries. Owaisi told police that the [attack was linked to his reporting](#) on local drug trafficking. Although police arrested three suspects following the attack, several assailants remain at large nearly three months later.
- **Withdraw the [Foreign Media Facilitation Guidelines](#), 2026.** The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting's draconian new guidelines require international and Pakistani journalists who contribute to foreign news outlets, including social media and web-based platforms, to obtain a no-objection certificate (NOC) for "official assignments, especially for work outside Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi." Authorities can suspend journalists' accreditation or the accreditation for media outlets for acts deemed contrary to Pakistan's "ideology, sovereignty, security, or public order," the guidelines say. The guidelines also require all foreign media outlets and those who work with them — from sources to local fixers — to register with and obtain separate media accreditation from the information ministry. Foreign journalists visiting the northeastern cities of Abbottabad or Murree, which is close to the border with Kashmir, for "leisure purposes" are required to obtain an NOC as well.
- **Stop using PECA and NCCIA investigations to criminalize journalism.** On June 5, the NCCIA arrested journalist [Sohrab Barkat](#) over a YouTube report about protests in Pakistan-administered Kashmir and registered a case against him under PECA, alleging he had disseminated false information. Barkat, who had previously been detained for about 100 days between November 2025 and March 2026 in separate cases linked to his journalism, was released on bail on June 15. [Several other journalists](#) have been investigated under PECA or by the NCCIA for their journalism in recent months.
- **Cease using information blackouts to restrict reporting.** On June 5, [internet services](#) were suspended in Pakistan-administered Kashmir due to widespread protests in the region and were only partially restored weeks later. The blackout severely limited journalists' ability to report, communicate with sources, verify events, and transmit material. On August 2, access to [Al Jazeera's website](#) was blocked after government criticism of the outlet's reporting in Kashmir.
- **Stop interfering in the operations of independent broadcasters.** On July 22, Aaj TV dismissed veteran journalist [Munizae Jahangir](#) after 11 years at the station and cancelled her current affairs program, Spotlight. Jahangir's dismissal followed pressure from authorities and her removal reflects a [broader pattern](#) in which journalists are taken off air after reporting on issues considered sensitive by the state or other powerful actors. The government has interfered with Pakistan's news media in other ways, including [suspending](#) on June 28 the broadcast license of Geo News, one of Pakistan's largest Urdu-language news channels, for 15 days for broadcasting "religious visualization" that it deemed could offend religious sentiments and disturb public order.

Thank you for your attention to these urgent concerns. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

Freedom Network Pakistan

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

International Press Institute
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
Rural Media Network Pakistan

CC:

H.E Attaullah Tarar
Federal Minister of Information & Broadcasting

H.E Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar
Federal Minister for Law and Justice

Ms. Rabiya Javeri Agha
Chairperson
National Commission for Human Rights Pakistan