

Reporters Without Borders

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Asia - Afghanistan

Censorship and intimidation

Attempts to censor and intimidate two Kabul news media

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Reporters Without Borders condemns attempts to censor *Pajhwok Afghan News* and *Radio Killid* after they reported that there was a shootout on 25 July at a Kabul clinic between gunmen working for two Members of Parliament. An attempt was also made to intimidate the head of the *Killid Media Group*.

"The government's interference in the activities of *Radio Killid* and *Pajhwok Afghan News* is illegal and constitutes a direct attack on their independence," Reporters Without Borders said. "No official or elected representative should be allowed to violate media freedom by trying to censor criticism. This is an abuse of authority."

The sequence of violent events began when a man employed by the MP Mulavi Tarakhel went to a clinic in the Kabul district of Pul-i-Charkhi on 25 July for a medical check and insisted on seeing a doctor at once. The clinic's staff refused, and other patients – who included gunmen working for another MP, Haji Allah Gul Mujahid – objected.

Tarakhel's man reportedly left but returned an hour late and began shooting indiscriminately inside the clinic. An exchange of shots began at about 5:30 pm and continued for seven hours without any intervention on the part of the security forces.

Radio Killid carried an initial report about the gun battle and subsequent updates. *Pajhwok Afghan News* also covered it. **Najiba Ayubi**, a reporter who heads of the *Killid Media Group*, was quoted by *Pajhwok Afghan News* as saying: "We updated the report with quotes from security officials. We also did our bit to take comments from the MPs, but they could not be reached."

An information ministry official telephoned Ayubi at around 7:30 a.m. on 27 July and asked her to stop broadcasting reports on the incident. The information ministry later acknowledged calling the *Killid Media Group* but denied requesting the suppression of any information.

Two unidentified individuals subsequently went to Ayubi's home. She did not open the door.

The two MPs filed a complaint which the information ministry passed on to the Media Offences Verification Commission. At a meeting on 31 July, the two MPs asked representatives from *Pajhwok Afghan News* and *Radio Killid* to apologize but they refused and called for a police investigation. Yesterday, the MPs asked the judicial authorities to start proceeding against the two media.

"We regret that the two MPs are abusing their authority to censor news coverage and we point out that they can always use their right of reply, which is more conducive to a peaceful settlement of a dispute," Reporters Without Borders said. "We support *Pajhwok Afghan News* and *Radio Killid*, which are among Afghanistan's most professional media, and we urge the authorities to ensure their journalists are protected, especially Najiba Ayubi."
