

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/pakistan-seven-newspapers-investigated-for-05-06-2013,44723.html>

Asia - Pakistan

"First Information Report"

Seven newspapers investigated for printing militants' press release

5 June 2013

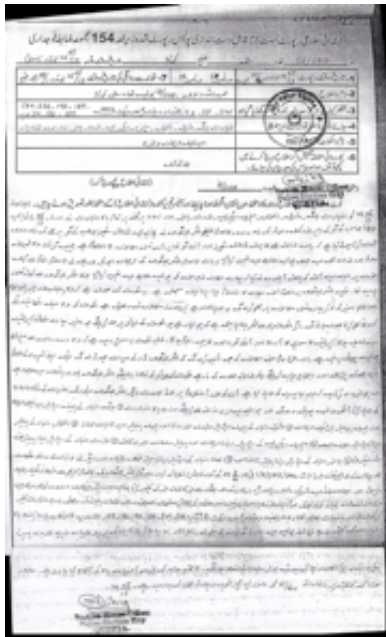
Reporters Without Borders is releasing a copy of the "First Information Report" that police in Quetta, in the southwestern province of Balochistan, issued in response to a formal complaint on 15 May against seven newspapers for publishing a communiqué by the outlawed militant group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.

"No one can dispute the right to file a complaint against a newspaper, but accusing a news outlet of providing a platform to terrorists by publishing an organization's press release, even when it is an illegal organization, is unacceptable," Reporters Without Borders said.

"By reporting Lashkar-e-Jhangvi's demands, the media were just doing their job, which is to cover the news, and they cannot be accused of complicity or participation in the group's activities.

"Balochistan's media are the hostages both of armed groups that often accuse them of failing to cover their activities and statements, and of authorities that harass those that refuse to limit themselves to quoting official statements and just covering the activities of the security forces.

"The public needs to be informed about the activities and views of all parties to a conflict, even if some of the comments reported by the media are made by those who are violently opposed to freedom. We urge the authorities to take no action in response to this complaint and to focus their efforts on protecting journalists."



First Information Report

The seven newspapers named in the 15 May complaint are *Jang*, *Mashriq*, *Intikhab*, *Express*, *Qudrat*, *Baakhbar* and *Zamana*. It accuses them and their editors of publishing “illegal information” and spreading fear among the population. Some of the charges are covered by Pakistan’s anti-terrorism legislation.

In the offending communiqué, which the newspapers printed the previous day, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing that killed six people but missed its target, the head of Balochistan’s police. The group also threatened to continue this type of attack if the police continued to investigate its activities.

“We don’t carry LeJ’s statements out of our love for this organization,” a Quetta-based newspaper editor told Reporters Without Borders on condition of anonymity. “LeJ would have targeted us if we had declined to publish its statement. The government should first restore its authority in Quetta by eliminating terrorist organizations like LeJ and once we have confidence in the security situation, we will stop carrying their statements.”

Proceedings were initiated against *Mashriq*, *Express*, *Intikhab* and *Jang* before a Balochistan court on 12 April for publishing press releases put out by the Balochistan Liberation Army, a banned separatist group, but the case was dropped after the editors of the four newspapers apologized.

Balochistan’s media are trapped between the security forces and Islamist and armed separatist groups, both of which are classified by Reporters Without Borders as “Predators of Press Freedom.”

A total of four journalists have been killed in Balochistan since the start of the year. Three – Imran Shaikh, Saifur Rehman and Mohammad Iqbal – were killed in a double bombing targeting the Shiite community in Quetta on 10 January. The fourth, Mehmood Ahmed Afridi, was gunned down in Karat on 1 March in a killing claimed by the Balochistan Liberation Army.

Balochistan is on the Reporters Without Borders list of the world’s ten most dangerous places for journalists.

Photo : Dawn.com