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Asia - Pakistan

Gag attempt

## Government targets Geo News TV after attack on leading journalist

23 April 2014

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Reporters Without Borders is outraged by the attempt of the Pakistani government to close down the TV station *Geo News* after the news channel broadcast allegations about the Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) spy agency, suspected by the journalist **Hamid Mir** of being behind a plot to kill him last weekend.

The broadcasting regulator, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority, (PEMRA), was asked by the defence minister, Khawaja Asif, to find a legal means of attacking *Geo News* under [Sections 33 and 36 of the PEMRA Ordinance 2002](#).

These sections deal with the penalties for various offences, which can include fines, imprisonment and the seizure of equipment, depending on the circumstances. Section 36 provides for penalties according to the type of offence committed but gives no details, arousing fears of a possible broadcasting ban.

"The broadcast by *Geo News* of an interview with the victim's brother does not constitute an offence," said Benjamin Ismail, the head of Reporters Without Borders Asia-Pacific desk.

"Furthermore, the security agencies allegedly involved are perfectly free to [address the suspicions](#) against them by using the ISPR public relations service. We caution the authorities against taking any action against *Geo News* or its presenter, Hamid Mir."

[Hamid Mir was shot](#) at just after he landed at Karachi airport on 19 April. Shortly before the attack he told his brother Amir that "if he is attacked, the ISI, and its chief, Lieut. Gen. Zaheerul Islam, would be responsible." Amir was quoted to this effect by *Geo News*, which is now accused by the government of damaging the image of the intelligence agency.

Hamid Mir, who presents the program "Capital Talk" on *Geo News*, had written about enforced disappearances blamed on the ISI. Since 2011 he has received threats and warnings as a result of his stories and has been prosecuted in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan, where the intelligence services are particularly active.

Pakistan is ranked 158th of 180 countries in the 2014 [World Press Freedom Index](#) compiled by Reporters Without Borders. [Pakistan's intelligence services](#), suspected of being behind the disappearances and murders of journalists, are listed among the "predators of press freedom".

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