



**WAN-IFRA is the World Association  
of News Publishers**

Our mission is to protect the rights of journalists and publishers around the world to operate independent media. We provide our members with expertise and services to innovate and prosper in a digital world and perform their crucial role in society.

With formal representative status at the United Nations, UNESCO and the Council of Europe, WAN-IFRA derives its authority from a global network of leading news publishing companies and technology entrepreneurs, and its legitimacy from 80 national association members representing 18,000 publications in 120 countries.

[www.wan-ifra.org](http://www.wan-ifra.org)

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Mr. Imran Khan  
Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan  
Islamabad, Pakistan

Via email

2 April 2020

Prime Minister,

We are writing on behalf of the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum, which represent 18,000 publications, 15,000 online sites and over 3,000 companies in more than 120 countries, to express our deep concern at the arrest of Mr. Mir Shakil-ur-Rehman, owner, CEO and Editor-in-Chief of the Jang Media Group and Geo TV, and call for his immediate release. We take this opportunity to draw your attention to the urgent need to address a declining situation for independent journalism in Pakistan, a process that, despite originating with your predecessors, has not improved under your administration.

According to reports, Mr. Rehman was arrested on 12 March by the National Accountability Bureau in relation to unproven events dating back to a land purchase made some 34 years ago. The Bureau alleges that Mr. Rehman illegally leased land from the government of then Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, in 1986 and proceeded to have ownership transferred to him in 2016, when Mr. Sharif again headed the government.

Mr. Rehman denies the allegations and claims the property was acquired via a private transaction.

We reiterate similar concerns to those raised in recent weeks by opposition politicians, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, and international media freedom organisations in questioning the independence of the National Accountability Bureau by denouncing what appear to be politicised moves to silence a critical voice and further stifle press freedom in the country.

In the context of wider claims of official pressure and intimidation against Jang Media Group employees, as well as reported threats to use the media regulator to shut down its television channels, we find the arrest of Mr. Rehman particularly alarming as it fits to a pattern of orchestrated harassment against a critical independent media organisation.



Furthermore, we understand that the on-going suspension of official government advertising to Jang Media Group outlets, the English-language Dawn newspaper, and other independent titles around the country is having a highly detrimental effect, threatening the financial stability of media that were already suffering under the present economic climate and leading to retrenchments and downsizing.

We remind you that the withholding of official advertising, or the preferential treatment or favouring of some media above others based on their relationship to those in power, is a form of soft censorship. This practice has a deleterious effect to the health and viability of the media ecosystem and is the antithesis to transparent, democratic governance in support of a free press.

In the context of the current global Covid-19 outbreak, we would urge you, Mr. Prime Minister, to support media plurality and ensure your actions - or those of your government - strengthen rather than hinder the work of the independent press.

We call for the immediate release of Mr. Rehman while the decision on whether to take his case to trial is made. Should charges be pursued, we urge you to ensure any process is conducted independently and free from any political influence.

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. Lopez-Madrado', with a horizontal line above the first few letters.

**Fernando De Yarza Lopez-Madrado**  
President, WAN-IFRA

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Warren Fernandez', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

**Warren Fernandez**  
President, World Editors Forum