

Musharraf shuts down GEO TV

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ISLAMABAD: GEO TV, Pakistan's premier Urdu news channel, also seen round the world as the main source of news and current affairs, was shut down at 1 a.m. Pakistan time (12 midnight Dubai time) after President Pervez Musharraf put tremendous pressure to silence a media outlet which had refused to bow down to his dictate s.

Informed sources said President Pervez Musharraf himself intervened to stop all GEO news transmissions from Dubai, after a two-week standoff in Pakistan during which all major news channels were shut down by cable operators, who are directly controlled by the Pakistani authorities.

The shutting down of the Geo News was universally condemned by almost every political party and member of the civil society minutes before the anchors, almost in tears, signed off.

PML-N leader Mian Nawaz Sharif told Dr. Shahid Masood on telephone from London it was a tragic moment in Pakistan's history as the Musharraf regime was bent upon destroying every symbol of free speech and democracy in the country.

Makhdoon Amin Faheem, the PPP Vice Chairman told Geo News, in its dying moments, that it would be a tragedy for the country and democracy if Geo went off the air, which it did minutes later.

Lt. General Talat Masood, Retired Chief Justice Saeeduzzaman Siddiqi and many others representing the civil society, who used to appear regular in Geo talk shows, expressed shock and disgust at the decision to shut of Geo TV.

Popular news anchors came on Geo News around midnight Pakistan time to announce that their channel had been ordered to go off the air as result of the continued deadlock between the Pakistani authorities and the media channels, following the imposition of the emergency in the country.

In Pakistan all GEO channels were blocked by the military regime after the imposition of the emergency but on Friday two main channels, DAWN News and AAJ were back on air, with AAJ announcing that two its most popular talks shows, hosted by Talat Hussain, Nusrat Javeed and Mushtaq Mihas, were suspended temporarily.

Geo News was shut down because it had refused to budge. After six years of objective and highly professional telecasts, which earned the channel the honour of being the most popular TV channel, the Government of Pakistan put it off the air on Nov 4 after emergency was imposed.

Geo News was under pressure from day one. The government tried to bring it down but the channel became a household name in Pakistan and abroad and was declared by the international observers as the most watched and popular TV channel.

Its role in the judicial crisis, which started on March 9, when the President filed a reference against the Chief Justice, was highly applauded, domestically and internationally.

Geo kept the whole world informed about the developments regarding the events unfolding during the struggle of people of Pakistan for restoration of dignity of the judiciary through its objective

reporting by giving all points of view. The programmes, talks shows and commentaries produced by Geo created an impact and awareness among the people.

Sources said the government first asked the Geo administration to stop the most popular programmes of popular TV hosts Dr. Shahid Masood, Hamid Mir and Kamran Khan without offering any tangible reason why they should be stopped.

After the success of the Chief Justice campaign all private news channels were banned from telecasting live programmes and filming outside the studios.

The media workers protested against the move and the government had to accept the demands of the media workers. The shows were allowed to continue but live coverage was banned.

In the meanwhile General Pervez Musharraf kept on resorting to pressure tactics and the Geo channels revenue sources were targeted.

Under his orders all government advertisements were not only stopped but other commercial advertisers were also pressurized not to give business to Geo. The channel withstood all the pressures and suffered huge losses. A statement submitted in the Sindh High Court on Friday said almost Rs1 billion was lost by the channel.

After the emergency General Musharraf banned Geo and other channels inside Pakistan. Geo stood the pressure and refused to sign on the dotted line.

The sources pointed out that the government under General Pervez Musharraf enhanced its pressure on the media to regulate itself under the command of the administration after the clamping of emergency.

The media was strangled through an ordinance that placed restrictions on its freedom that had no precedent. It was virtually made impossible to carry on free journalism in the country in the presence of the said ordinance.

A so-called code of conduct was thrust upon the media to follow without any consultations with the journalist community. Private channels were asked to sign an undertaking that would have made the channels subservient to the authorities.

This was done after suspending all private channels of the country and the channel administrations were asked to accept the conditions and sign the document of undertaking.

They were told to accept provisional licences instead of the permanent ones they had. The earlier licences were cancelled through the same order.

The sources said that General Pervez Musharraf asked the channels to stop their current affairs programmes, which were not acceptable to him and demanded that anchorpersons should be fired.

The channels who signed the document were restored on the cable. Some channels accepted the official advice while others refused to follow.

Geo declined to oblige General Pervez Musharraf as the demands included cooperation on all points which the new caretaker government would bring up.

It was demanded that Geo should stop the objectionable current affairs programmes and toe the official line.

The authorities wanted that the channel should cooperate with President General Pervez Musharraf.

The channel was further asked to submit all its programmes for monitoring by government officials, as no programme without clearance would be aired.

The sources said that Geo was first forbidden in Pakistan through cable not brought under pressure through the authorities concerned of the country from where it was being aired.

The channel was being seen at some places in the country through dish antennas and Internet but the government's technical experts first tried to stop it on the Internet and then a ban was placed on the import of dish antenna and relevant equipment used for receiving direct satellite signals.

The authorities in the host country had to ask the Geo News to stop its telecast from their up-linking station under excruciating pressure coming from the Government of Pakistan without considering its long-term adverse impact on the image of the host country.

The authorities concerned while conveying the message of the Pakistan Government to close down the channel, ridiculed the decision as they had no experience of facing such a demand which was contrary to all norms of decency and business in the modern time business culture, the sources revealed.

Geo's voice was silenced by General Pervez Musharraf as its anchors, almost in tears, bid farewell to its viewers and listeners.

Journalists march against Geo News closure (Updated at 0300)

KARACHI: The journalists including employees Geo TV Network marched from Geo office to Governor House in token protest against the closure of Geo News across the world.

Although the march was peaceful against the complete closure of Geo News but the Police used force to stop the march.

We are passing through critical time: Nasir Baig (Updated at 0230)

KARACHI: Reacting to closure of Geo News, senior analyst of Geo TV Network said that we are passing through a critical time.

Under extreme pressure from Musharraf government, Geo News was shut down late Friday night by the authorities of the country from where the Geo News was being aired and as a result Geo News has been off air across the globe.