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PRESS RELEASE

ON COC RECOMMENDATIONS, PEMRA SUSPENDS DR. SHAHID MASOOD AND HIS PROGRAMME FOR 30 DAYS, FINES RS 1 MILLION; RECOMMENDATIONS AGAINST AAMIR LIAQUAT ON MAULANA FAZL-UR-REHMAN COMPLAINT DEFERRED TILL THE DECISION OF REVIEW PETITION IN SUPREME COURT BY BOL NEWS.

The Council of Complaints Sindh has recommended suspension of Dr. Shahid Masood and his programme "Live with Dr. Shahid Masood" for 30 days and imposition of Rs 1 million fine on the channel for making baseless allegations against Pakistan Army and Federal Ministers for Finance and Defence without any proof.

Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Federal Minister for Finance lodged a complaint with PEMRA stating through his lawyer Mr. Munawar Iqbal Duggal, that the anchor in the programme aired on January 24, 2017 made allegations of a defamatory nature about an alleged meeting in "Rawalpindi", with the malafide and ulterior motives of attacking the integrity of the Federal Minister. He further stated that in the said programme aired on, defamatory contents were aired regarding an alleged meeting of Mr. Dar and Mr. Khawaja with senior military leadership in "Rawalpindi". Whereas, no such meeting took place and the allegations are false and fabricated and present a totally fictitious account.

M/s. Labbaik Private Limited was provided two opportunities of personal hearing at PEMRA Council of Complaints, Sindh i.e. on February 2, 2017 and February 10, 2017, however, the TV channel and its host/co-host failed to defend their position or present any evidence in favour of such scandalous comments about the Pakistan Army, Federal Minister for Finance and Federal Minister for Defense and instead kept seeking adjournments by the CoC. The content aired thereof was deemed as a willful attempt to misinform the viewers through fabricated stories, not only on a highly sensitive matter but also about civil-military relationship when the armed forces are fighting a valiant war against terrorists which need support through unity rather than concocted stories of differences between state institutions on a highly sensitive matter. Such rumour mongering during war are demoralizing for the nation and the armed forces and only benefit the enemies of the state of Pakistan. This also cast aspersions against Pakistan Army which has expressed at several occasions its commitment with the Constitution and rule of law.

The official record of PEMRA confirms that Shahid Masood is a willful and repeat violator of PEMRA Code of Conduct and had been trying to create sensationalism through his irresponsible, untrue and derogatory comments against individuals and the state institutions in the past as well. In certain instances, PEMRA had been taking cognizance which was upheld by the Honorable Judiciary as well.

Therefore, Dr. Shahid Masood and his programme will remain suspended for 30 days along with imposition of Rs 1 million fine. Following up on the PEMRA decision, the management of M/s Airwaves (NewsOne) Pvt Ltd has also been conveyed the decision as apparently

Shahid Masood has joined NewsOne. Any violation by BOL News or NewsOne, PEMRA would take action against the license holder(s), in accordance with the law.

Regarding the complaint of Mrs. Shahida Akhtar Ali, MNA, JUI-(F) against M/s Labbaik (Pvt) Ltd (Bol News TV) for airing programme "Aisay Nahi Chalay Ga" hosted by Aamir Liaquat on 21st November 2016 in which derogatory remarks and false allegations were made against her leader Maulana Fazl-Ur-Rehman, the decision on the recommendations of CoC has been deferred until the Supreme Court decides on a review petition filed by M/s Labbaik in this case.

PEMRA expects that its license holders would show their commitment with Code of Conduct and Law of the Land through their actions as they express it in words during meetings over the last several months.

Learning lessons from the events in the recent past plaguing Pakistan's media industry, it may be underlined that it is a collective responsibility of all stake holders to stop providing platforms to repeat offenders who misuse media freedom to broadcast hate speech, make baseless and defamatory allegations, against individuals and state institutions and try to create uncertainty about the country, its pillars, its future and its system.

Apt to quote here a few lines from DAWN editorial of 11-2-2017: "...even those playing with fire can be made to understand that long-term survival and self-interest demand that mutually acceptable red lines be respected. An industry adrift needs urgent correction; the public, journalists and media organizations all deserve better."

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