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Government Pressure Cripples Pakistan's Leading Rights Watchdog

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The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has sounded alarms over systematic government obstruction targeting its operations, including office closures, frozen bank accounts, and threats against staff. Secretary-General Harris Khalique revealed unprecedented pressure tactics, from event cancellations to fabricated charges of commercial

activities, signaling a dangerous erosion of civil liberties in the nuclear-armed nation.

Founded in 1987 by legal luminaries including late Supreme Court Justice Dorab Patel, HRCP has long served as Pakistan's moral conscience documenting rights abuses from honor killings to enforced disappearances. The current crackdown employs bureaucratic harassment: inflated utility bills, venue denials for seminars, and intimidation calls to female staffers allegedly from security officials. "These aren't random acts but coordinated efforts to silence criticism," noted veteran rights advocate Hina Jilani, highlighting blocked events in Gilgit-Baltistan and Islamabad discussing Balochistan's crisis. 

The government's heavy-handed approach coincides with worsening security and economic crises. While authorities claim to target "foreign-funded NGOs," HRCP's domestic funding and transparent operations undermine such pretexts. Analysts suggest the crackdown aims to suppress reporting on sensitive issues from military operations in Balochistan to rising sectarian violence. The tactics mirror regional authoritarian playbooks, using financial strangulation and administrative hurdles to neuter watchdogs without outright bans.

As HRCP's lights dim in Lahore, so too fades Pakistan's pretense of democratic governance. The assault on civil society undermines both constitutional rights and international standing, particularly when juxtaposed with the state's failure to curb genuine threats like militant groups. True stability requires empowering not dismantling institutions that uphold rule of law and accountability. The world watches whether Pakistan will course-correct or descend deeper into authoritarianism.