
Fault in submarine cable disrupting internet services across Pakistan, claims PTA chairman

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Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) Chairman Major General (retd) Hafeezur Rehman has claimed that a fault in a submarine cable is disrupting internet services across Pakistan. He expressed these remarks during a meeting of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Information Technology chaired by Syed Aminul Haque. The committee session saw the participation of IT Minister Shaza Fatima, opposition leader Omar Ayub, and other members. The meeting was convened to discuss nationwide internet disruptions and social media access issues. The PTA chairman was summoned to provide a detailed briefing on the situation. Rehman explained that a fault in one of the submarine cables has affected the internet in Pakistan. "Seven fibre optic cables connect Pakistan internationally; one of them is currently down. The consortium responsible for the cable has indicated that repairs should be completed by August 27," he said.

“7.5 terabytes of data flow through this cable, and its outage has significantly affected internet services, especially for those using VPNs,” he claimed. He added that the situation has led to slowed local internet services, especially for users relying on VPNs. Discussing the internet disruptions further, committee members pressed the PTA chairman on why VPNs have become a necessity for users. Rehman explained that some data, not available on local content delivery networks (CDNs), becomes accessible via VPNs, thus leading to increased reliance on them during such outages. Questions were also raised about whether other countries are facing similar submarine cable issues. Rehman clarified, “It’s Pakistan’s submarine cable that’s affected, not others.” Concerns over the legal standing of VPN usage were brought up, to which Rehman admitted his lack of knowledge and promptly called for the legal advisor’s input. The PTA chairman went on to elaborate on the complexities of monitoring online content, stating, “While Article 19 guarantees freedom of expression, there are five or six categories to consider when enforcing restrictions. Each country has its system in place, and when the government issues directives to block certain content, we have to comply.” The session took a critical turn when PTCL’s president failed to attend, prompting frustration from committee members. Omar Ayub noted that he had postponed a court hearing to attend, underscoring the significance of the issue at hand. Committee Chairman Aminul Haq issued a directive to summon PTCL’s CEO to the next

session to explain the absence. The committee pressed further on the economic impact of the disruption. Rehman disclosed that the telecom sector has incurred losses amounting to Rs300 million over the past six days. Concerns were also raised about the impact on freelancers and small businesses dependent on reliable internet access. In response to questions about the legality of VPN use, the PTA chairman admitted his lack of clarity on the matter, prompting the summoning of a legal advisor. Concluding the session, Haque emphasised the importance of giving due respect to the committee and ensuring attendance at future meetings.