
X banned over 'misuse' of platform, interior ministry informs IHC

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ISLAMABAD:

The Interior Ministry informed the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday that the ban on social networking site X, formerly Twitter, was necessary following the platform's failure to address concerns regarding its misuse. Interior Secretary Khurram Agha, on behalf of the ministry, submitted a report in court in response to a petition challenging the ban on the social media platform. The report also requested the court to dismiss the petition stating that 'no right of the petitioner has been deprived'. The report maintained that the "failure of Twitter/X to adhere to the lawful directives of the government of Pakistan and address concerns regarding the misuse of its platform necessitated the imposition of a ban". It added that the petition against the closure of X is contrary to law and facts. The FIA Cybercrime Wing had requested X to ban accounts that were

propagating against the chief justice, the report said. It noted that X officials ignored the requests of the FIA Cybercrime Wing and did not respond, following which the decision to temporarily close the site was taken. The report stated that at the request of intelligence agencies, the Ministry of Interior issued orders for the closure of X on February 17, 2024, aimed at safeguarding the national security and law and order situation.

“The decision to impose a ban on Twitter/X in Pakistan was made in the interest of upholding national security, maintaining public order, and preserving the integrity of our nation,” said the report. “Social media platforms are being used indiscriminately to spread extremist ideas and false information. X is being used as a tool by some nefarious elements to undermine law and order and promote instability,” it added. The ministry stated in the report that the closure of X is not against Article 19 of the Constitution and is in response to the rising security concerns that led to the ban on many social media platforms, even around the world. The report also added that X’s closure is not intended to curtail freedom of expression or access to information, but is aimed at the responsible use of social media platforms in accordance with the law. “The Ministry of Interior is the protector of the citizens of Pakistan and responsible for national stability.” The ministry’s report highlighted that social media platform TikTok was also banned by the government earlier, adding that the ban was lifted after TikTok signed an agreement to abide by Pakistani law. The IHC

at the last hearing dismissed a report submitted by the Ministry of Interior regarding the closure of X. During the court session, the joint-secretary of the interior stated that X was shut down in Pakistan based on a report submitted by the Intelligence Bureau (IB). According to the report, the content uploaded on X and other social media platforms was deemed a threat to national security, he said.

The court observed that the government had closed down X based on a speculative report. The bench emphasized that authorities must present solid evidence, even if the content on X is indeed a security risk to the state. Access to the social media giant has been blocked since February 17 after allegations of rigging during the general elections. The prolonged disruption of X raised widespread concerns about democratic freedoms in the country. A total of 28 civil society organisations, including Amnesty International and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, issued a joint statement of condemnation. Besides, Federal Information Minister Attaullah Tarar also acknowledged that X was indeed suspended in Pakistan. He said “There was no official notification for it. But obviously, everyone can see that its frequency and signal are not functioning normally, and it is being accessed through VPNs. This is indeed true.”