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## Government authorises ISI to intercept calls and messages for national security

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ISLAMABAD:

The Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication has issued a notification authorising the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to intercept and trace calls within the domain of national security, under Section 54 of the Pakistan Telecommunication (Re-organisation) Act, 1996. "In exercise of the powers conferred under Section 54 ... the federal government in the interest of national security and in the apprehension of any offense, is pleased to authorize the officers not below the rank of grade 18 to be nominated from time to time by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to intercept calls and messages or to trace calls through any telecommunication system as envisaged under Section 54 of the Act," the notification read. It further specifies that the

government will prioritise and have precedence in the telecommunications system over any licensee to safeguard national defense or security against foreign threats. “The federal government in the interest of national security and in the apprehension of any offence is pleased to authorise the officers [...] to be nominated from time to time by ISI to intercept calls and messages or to trace calls through any communication system,” the notification further read. The decision appears to be in line with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s administration’s efforts to tighten social media rules. Prominent social media platform X has remained prohibited under the similar pretext of national security. The premier, earlier in May, had also approved a draft to amend the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016 which suggested the establishment of a Digital Rights Protection Authority. The government is also installing a national firewall on different internet service providers (ISPs) to rein in social media with filters capable of blocking unwanted content from reaching a wider audience, as reported by the media. The firewall aims to identify and block content deemed harmful to national security, alongside considerations to regulate the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs).