
SUMMARY of the Article “Silencing the public,” Editorial, Dawn, February 21st, 2024

The editorial criticizes the recent decision by the authorities in Islamabad to block access to X (formerly Twitter), a popular digital platform for self-expression. Describing the move as a desperate attempt to control public discourse, the editorial highlights the repressive nature of such actions in the current era where millions of people worldwide use platforms like X to exchange news and views. The authorities, fearing the public’s influence on the narrative agenda, have resorted to cutting off access. The editorial points out the hypocrisy of caretaker ministers who, despite the ban, continue to post on X using VPN services. It particularly criticizes the IT minister for celebrating the growth of Pakistan’s IT industry without addressing the sudden denial of access to a globally popular social medium. The editorial questions the impact of such actions on Pakistan’s digital economy and calls for accountability, especially considering the recent suspension of mobile phone services during the elections, which hindered citizens’ constitutional rights.

Easy/Short SUMMARY:

The authorities in Islamabad have blocked access to X (formerly Twitter), a move criticized as a desperate attempt to control public discourse. The editorial points out the hypocrisy of ministers who continue to use VPN services to post on X while denying citizens the same privilege. The IT minister is criticized for celebrating the growth of Pakistan’s IT industry without addressing the denial of access to a popular social medium. The editorial questions the impact on Pakistan’s digital economy and calls for accountability, considering recent actions like the suspension of mobile phone services during elections.

SOLUTIONS of The Problem:

Establish Transparent Internet Policies

The government should establish clear and transparent internet access and telecom policies, ensuring stability and predictability for entrepreneurs and investors.

Ensure Accountability of the PTA

The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) should be held accountable for its actions, and legal measures, such as lawsuits, should be pursued to address violations of citizens’ rights.

Promote Digital Rights

There is a need to promote and protect digital rights, emphasizing citizens’ freedom of expression in the digital space. This could involve advocacy, awareness campaigns, and legal initiatives.

Encourage Entrepreneurship

To attract investment in Pakistan’s digital sector, the government should create an environment conducive to entrepreneurship, where investors feel confident about the stability of internet and telecom policies.

Review and Revoke Bans

The authorities should review and reconsider the bans on digital platforms, ensuring that any restrictions imposed are justified, transparent, and aligned with citizens’ constitutional rights.

Enhance Cybersecurity Measures

To address concerns that may lead to internet bans, the government should focus on enhancing cybersecurity measures to mitigate potential threats without resorting to blanket bans.

Engage in Constructive Dialogue

Engaging in open and constructive dialogue with the public, digital rights advocates, and industry stakeholders can help address concerns and find solutions that balance security and citizens’ rights.

Seek International Guidance

The government can seek international guidance on formulating internet policies that strike a balance between security concerns and the promotion of digital rights.

Invest in Digital Literacy

Promoting digital literacy among the public can empower citizens to navigate the digital landscape responsibly and contribute positively to online discussions, reducing the perception of the need for censorship.

Establish Oversight Mechanisms

Establishing independent oversight mechanisms to monitor and evaluate internet-related decisions can ensure transparency, accountability, and adherence to constitutional principles.

IMPORTANT Facts and Figures Given in the Article:

- Pakistan’s authorities have blocked access to X (formerly Twitter).
- The decision is seen as an attempt to control public discourse and silence dissent.
- Caretaker ministers are accused of hypocrisy for using VPN services to access X while the public is denied the same privilege.
- The IT minister celebrates the growth of Pakistan’s IT industry without addressing the denial of access to a popular social medium.
- The editorial criticizes the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) for curtailing citizens’ digital rights without providing a justification.
- The PTA’s previous actions, such as the suspension of mobile phone services



during elections, are highlighted as contributing to political instability and alleged irregularities.

MCQs from the Article:

1. What digital platform has been blocked by authorities in Islamabad?

- A. Facebook
- B. X (formerly Twitter)**
- C. Instagram
- D. LinkedIn

2. Why does the editorial criticize the IT minister?

- A. Celebrating the growth of the IT industry
- B. Announcing new schemes for the industry
- C. Achieving 13 items on the agenda
- D. Not addressing the denial of access to a popular social medium**

3. What does the editorial suggest as a solution to address the denial of internet access?

- A. Celebrating the growth of the IT industry
- B. Using VPN services
- C. Legal measures, such as lawsuits against the PTA**
- D. Curtailing citizens' digital rights

4. What recent event is highlighted as contributing to political instability?

- A. Blockage of X (formerly Twitter)
- B. Celebration of IT industry growth
- C. Suspension of mobile phone services during elections**
- D. Use of VPN services by caretaker ministers

5. What is the main criticism of the authorities’ actions in the article?

- A. Lack of celebration for IT industry growth
- B. Excessive use of VPN services
- C. Transparent and justified internet policies
- D. Repressive actions and denial of digital rights**

VOCABULARY:

1. **Stench** (noun) (□□□□): A strong and unpleasant smell.
2. **Desperation** (noun) (□□□□□□): A state of despair, typically resulting in rash or extreme behavior.
3. **Thumb** (verb) (□□□□□): Exerting control or influence over.
4. **Repressive** (adjective) (□□□□): Inhibiting or restraining personal freedom.
5. **Converge** (verb) (□□□□ □□□□): Come together from different directions.
6. **Mealy-mouthed** (adjective) (□□□□): Avoiding the use of direct and plain language.
7. **Hypocrisy** (noun) (□□□□□□): The practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one’s behavior does not conform.
8. **Galling** (adjective) (□□□□□): Annoying; humiliating.
9. **Broadcasting** (verb) (□□□□ □□□): Making widely known.
10. **Abject** (adjective) (□□□ □□□): (of a situation or condition) Extremely bad, unpleasant, and degrading.
11. **Subject to Change** (phrase) (□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□): Prone to alteration or modification.
12. **Conducive** (adjective) (□□□□□□): Making a certain situation or outcome likely or possible.
13. **Mitigate** (verb) (□□□□ □□): Make (something bad) less severe, serious, or painful.
14. **Curtail** (verb) (□□□□ □□□□□): Reduce in extent or quantity.
15. **Adherence** (noun) (□□□□□□): Attachment or commitment to a person, cause, or belief.

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Silencing the public
Editorial

THE stench of desperation hangs heavy over Islamabad. The powerful have had a lot of trouble lately keeping the public under their thumb. Short of ideas, they have decided to block Pakistan’s access to X (formerly Twitter), one of the most popular digital mediums for self-expression. The authorities are seemingly so afraid of the public setting the narrative agenda that they have decided to simply pull the plug. Such repressive actions are a shame in this day and age: millions of opinion-makers and citizens around the world converge virtually each day on the platform to exchange important news and views — why can Pakistanis not be among them? There has been no word from the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority or the IT ministry, which would previously issue at least a mealy-mouthed explanation when denying the citizenry access to mainstream internet services. Even they have not figured out how to justify what is being done.

One marvels at the hypocrisy of some of our caretaker ministers, who have ostensibly been using VPN services to continue posting on X even as their own



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people are being denied the same privilege. The IT minister’s behaviour, in particular, is galling: during this latest blockage, he has celebrated the ‘take-off’ of Pakistan’s IT industry and achieving 13 items on his agenda, while also announcing two new schemes for the industry — all while not saying a word about why Pakistani users suddenly cannot access one of the world’s most popular social mediums. It seems he is more interested in self-promotion while the state is busy broadcasting its abject disregard for the digital economy. He should be asked: why would any entrepreneur bother investing in Pakistan, especially when the country’s internet access and telecom policies always seem subject to change without notice?

As for the PTA, the less said the better. In suspending mobile phone services without any prior warning throughout election day and well after, it had already wreaked immeasurable damage on Pakistan this month. Many citizens were left unable to exercise their constitutional rights due to the communications blackout, which also contributed towards worsening the political instability by providing a convenient cover for the alleged irregularities that occurred later that night. And yet, the authority refuses to learn. Acting as if it is unaccountable, it is now curtailing citizens’ digital rights without even bothering to come up with a justification. It seems that the PTA has quietly become just another tool in the hands of our habitually oppressive state, to be used against the people of Pakistan whenever they start inconveniencing the powers that be. It is important that it be checked immediately. With precedents available thanks to prior court rulings on internet bans, it should be sued for its actions.

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