

REMOVAL AND BLOCKING OF UNLAWFUL ONLINE CONTENT (PROCEDURES, OVERSIGHT AND SAFEGUARD) RULES, 2020

The Cabinet has notified the second version of the Rules under S.37 of Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), 2016. The heavily contested Rules followed a controversial consultative process that was rejected by the civil society and private sector. This timeline outlines the developments.

12 FEB 2020

Civil society bodies release a [joint statement](#) declaring the Rules a political move to control the internet and to silence opposing voices

17 FEB 2020

AIC, in a [detailed statement](#) addressed to PM Imran Khan, said that the Rules would make it “extremely difficult” for AIC members to provide services to users within Pakistan.

20 FEB 2020

Journalists union, lawyers and civil society [launched](#) a nationwide campaign to demand revocation of the Rules.

27 FEB 2020

MMfD [submitted](#) its key concerns, objections and recommendations on the Rules to parliamentarians.

29 FEB 2020

Over 100 rights groups and individuals, through a [statement](#), boycotted the consultative process initiated by the government, unless the Cabinet approval on the Rules is withdrawn.

10 Mar 2020

PTA [held](#) the second consultative meeting on the Rules attended by various stakeholders, where the committee discussed “setting the clear objectives to be achieved from the Rules and Consultation process be focused on the attainment of desired objectives”

18 MAY 2020

PTA [shared](#) a referendum-style survey on its website for comments on the Rules, as part of its consultation process. MMfD rejected this survey and maintained that the concerns previously highlighted by the civil society through various statements should first be addressed.

5 JUN 2020

AIC submitted its [response](#) to the Rules in response to the call for feedback by PTA. It highlighted that the Rules should first be de-notified, and mentions that the first version of the Rules would significantly alter the landscape for digital platforms, and would make it “extremely difficult” for them to operate in Pakistan.

2 OCT 2020

[News reports](#) claiming that the MoITT had requested the Cabinet to approve updated version of the Rules., now titled, "Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Content (Procedure, Oversight and Safeguards) Rules, 2020" are published. PTA fails to share the updated Rules despite requests.

23 OCT 2020

AIC issued a [statement](#) objecting to the process through which the Rules were formulated. It said that this is “causing international companies to re-evaluate their view of the regulatory environment in Pakistan, as well as their willingness to operate in the country”.

18 NOV 2020

MoITT shared the notified [copy of the new Rules](#) on its website. [Initial analysis](#) depicts that the Rules give broad powers to PTA over online content that go beyond the scope of s.37 of PECA.

11 FEB 2020

MMfD [acquired a copy](#) of the notified Rules, then-titled "Citizen Protection (Against Online Harm) Rules, 2020". The Rules were notified on January 21 by the Cabinet.

13 FEB 2020

A coalition of global technology companies, Asia Internet Coalition (AIC), [expressed concerns](#) over the Rules, calling them broad reaching.

19 FEB 2020

Owing to the criticism of civil society and private sector, a source close to the PM Imran Khan [told DRM](#) that the Rules will not be implemented in their current form, as directed by the PM in a closed-door meeting he chaired.

21 FEB 2020

Journalists union, lawyers, and civil society [held press conference](#) in Quetta, rejecting the Rules, and demanded immediate de-notification

28 FEB 2020

The government [announced](#) the beginning of the consultative process on the Rules. The Consultative Committee was formed under the guidance of the PM, and under the convening of Chairman PTA Amir Azeem Bajwa.

2 MAR 2020

PTA [held](#) the first consultative meeting on the Rules.

19 MAR 2020

The then-UNSR for the Right to Freedom of Expression and Opinion, David Kaye, and UNSR on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, Michel Forst [raised serious concerns](#) on the Rules in regards to the international human rights law obligations of the government of Pakistan to promote and protect freedom of expression

3 JUN 2020

Authorities officially [began](#) consultation process on the Rules despite the boycott. MMfD co founder writes an [open letter](#) to PTA highlighting concerns about the process.

4 JUN 2020

The first consultation meeting was held with digital rights and media groups. Only one representative of civil society attended the meeting, while majority continued their boycott.

17 AUG 2020

Islamabad High Court [issued](#) notices to PTA, Ministry of IT and Federal Government under a petition filed by Asad Baig challenging the Rules, and requesting the Court to declare them ultra vires.

7 OCT 2020

AIC, in a [letter](#) to the PM Imran Khan, expresses concerns over lack of consultation on the Rules, and over not making the new version public before seeking Cabinet's approval. It highlights, "As in any international best practice consultation process, it was a legitimate expectation of stakeholders that after initial input leading to a revised draft, policy makers would undertake an in depth consultation with industry”.

2 NOV 2020

Islamabad High Court [ordered](#) PTA to submit published Rules within 90 days, while hearing a petition challenging the ban on the video-sharing app TikTok.