



This timeline highlights major developments in the areas of digital rights, cyber laws, press freedom, data protection and online expression within Pakistan that were accorded extensive coverage on Digital Rights Monitor (DRM) in 2022.

- Reports start circulating of Jazz and Telenor databases getting breached, creating a wave of panic online. Names, phone numbers, CNICs, and residential addresses of over 138 million collective subscribers is speculated to have been put up for sale on Telegram. While Telenor Pakistan dismisses the reports, other telecom companies remain silent on the claimed data leaks.

Jan

- The Islamabad High Court (IHC) terms the Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Ordinance, 2022 a ‘draconian law’ that violates Article 19 of the Constitution. IHC Chief Justice Athar Minallah demands explanation regarding the approval of controversial amendments to the cybercrime law as an ordinance without it being approved from the Cabinet.

Feb

- The Islamabad High Court (IHC) questions the president’s authority to pass the PECA Amendment Ordinance 2022 and gives federal government the final chance to satisfy the court regarding the same. IHC Chief Justice Athar Minallah takes the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to task for surveillance of journalists in the country, saying social media is being misused by no one but political parties themselves.

Mar

- The Islamabad High Court (IHC) quashes the PECA Amendment Ordinance 2022 in a landmark ruling. Part of Section 20 concerning defamation of PECA is also struck down as ‘unconstitutional’. Additionally, court orders an inquiry against the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)’s Cybercrime Wing officials for misusing powers under PECA.

Apr

- Protests erupt in the Bajaur district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa against the suspension of cellular internet services for ‘security reasons’. Traders, students, activists, and telecom operators join widespread demonstrations calling for immediate restoration of the internet. The Peshawar-Bajaur highway remains blocked for hours.

May

- India blocks Twitter accounts run by Pakistani embassies in Iran, Egypt, Turkey, and the United Nations. Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry expresses concern over the suspensions and calls on Twitter to restore the accounts immediately.

Jun

- TikTok removes over 12.5 million videos from the Pakistani market for violating community guidelines. Pakistan ranks second globally for the largest volume of videos removed in the first quarter of 2022 behind the United States, which has over 14 million videos taken down.

Jul

- The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) bans live telecast of ousted prime minister Imran Khan’s addresses, citing ‘hate speech against state institutions’. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief is accused of persistently levelling ‘baseless’ accusations against army and judiciary and attempting to disturb public peace.

Aug

- The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) suspends the transmission of ARY News and BOL TV for three days, accusing them of violating the authority’s orders and regulations. The media watchdog says both stations failed to install an effective delay mechanism in their transmission.

Sep

- The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) arrests Senator Azam Swati for tweeting against state institutions, including former COAS Qamar Javed Bajwa. Swati is accused of putting out ‘a highly obnoxious and intimidating message’ through his tweets and is sent on a two-day physical remand. His arrest is roundly condemned by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders, rights activists and journalists on Twitter.

Oct

- The government authorises the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to take action against individuals spreading ‘rumours and false information against state institutions’ on social media by approving an amendment to the FIA Act, 1974. The amendment will make ‘anti-state’ content punishable by up to seven years in prison after final approval from the parliament.

Nov

- Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari announces Pakistani creators can monetise their Facebook content through the ‘Facebook Stars’ feature. The development comes following reports that Google has registered itself with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) under the controversial Social Media Rules 2021.

Dec