

National Assembly of Pakistan
Press Release

Kashmir Committee grills Twitter regional head for silencing Kashmiri voices under Indian influence

Twitter regional head offers holding awareness workshops for activists in Pakistan on Twitter regulations, vows to work together with PTA to provide equal opportunity to social media activists

ISLAMABAD - February 16, 2021: Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir Tuesday grilled the regional head of social media platform, Twitter, for silencing voices of thousands of Kashmiri and Pakistani activists projecting the plight of people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

In a special hearing held here at the Parliament House, the committee chairman Shehryar Khan Afridi led the questioning of Mr George Salama, who heads the Twitter regional office in the United Arab Emirates.

Afridi questioned Mr George about the Twitter policy on human rights and freedom of speech and whether Twitter regulations did not conform to the UN charter on freedom of speech and freedom of expression.

George, who attended the meeting through Zoom, said that Twitter has a specific policy and discourages hate speech and upholds freedom of expression. He said that Twitter authorities would ensure freedom of speech to all and voices of minorities would never be silenced.

Responding to a question by Shehryar Afridi about the misuse of Twitter regulations by Indian activists as exposed by EU Disinfo Lab, Mr George said that Twitter management always ensures freedom of speech on social media. He said that Kashmiri activists are free to raise their voice with legitimate accounts. He offered to organise workshops in Pakistan along with PTA for awareness of Pakistani and Kashmiri social media activists on Twitter regulations.

Shehryar Afridi said that when he was Minister for Interior two years back, Indian social media activists impersonating as Pakistanis were generating 80 tweets per minute from Indian cities to incite violence in Pakistan over the blasphemy issue.

Shehryar Afridi said Twitter unfortunately had double standards as no action was taken against Indian agents posting tweets aimed at inciting hate and violence in Pakistan. He said over 8 million people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir are being silenced under influence of Indian employees of Twitter.

George said that Twitter has zero tolerance against hate speech and violence. He said Twitter discourages posting misleading content through fake accounts once reported.

He said overlapping and duplicate contents are also discouraged by Twitter management.

Shehryar Afridi raised the misuse of UAPA black law by Indian occupational authorities and silencing of voices of Kashmiris. Responding to Shehryar Afridi, the Twitter representative said that Twitter position would remain equal for all parties of the conflict zone.

"We are working closely with PTA to ensure equal opportunities to social media users," Mr George said.

Shehryar Afridi urged the committee members to come forward and show interest to head various advisory boards so as subcommittees could be formed.

Special Secretary Lodhi briefed the Committee that till date the Kashmir Committee did not have its rules of procedures. He also laid before the committee draft rules for approval which could be published.

Law Minister Dr Farogh Naseem, Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Ms Shaheera Shahid and other senior officials also attended the meeting. Barrister Mohammad Ali Saif was nominated as convener of the subcommittee on Advisory Board on Lawfare for Kashmir.

Chairman PTA briefed the Committee on the suspension of social media accounts under influence of Indian operators since August 5, 2019. He said that PTA raised the suspension of accounts of Pakistani users under influence of a certain country and Twitter management responded that users are free to accept or deny Twitter rules.

He said the federal cabinet passed social media rules under which social media companies are bound to keep physical presence in Pakistan. He said that once PTA reports any account, Twitter have to comply within 24 hours.

Dr Farogh Naseem briefed the Committee on the local and international laws on freedom of speech and freedom of information for the 8 million Kashmiris.

"We have already won our case of sovereignty on Jammu and Kashmir in the United Nations and Jammu Kashmir dispute must be resolved according to the international law," law minister said. He said Modi regime was unleashing worst human rights violations to keep its illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir.

Chairman Pemra briefed the Committee that private and public television channels have been contributing hugely to raise awareness on the dispute of Jammu and Kashmir.

Asked by Shehryar Afridi whether the private channels were also focusing on developing films and dramas on the plight of caged people of Kashmir, the Chairman Pemra said that this year on February 5 regarding Kashmir Solidarity Day, some channels did not turn their logos back and Pemra was going to issue show cause notices to those TV channels.

Shehryar Afridi said that under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), private television

channels and media houses are bound to project Kashmir dispute and India's illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir and plight of the Kashmiris.

Chairman Pemra sought time to present a report on tele-films and dramas on Kashmir dispute.

Shehryar Afridi argued why Pemra was silent on the content of private channels' dramas about the sensitive relations, Chairman Pemra said that the institution had banned three dramas of private channels but the court had strike down the decision.

He said that entire Indian content had been banned by Pemra. He said that private TV channels were not developing any content on Kashmir and only content generated by public institutions was being run by private media.

The Committee chairman expressed dissatisfaction over the performance of the Pemra regarding highlighting Kashmir cause at private TV channels. Pakistan Television representative briefed the Committee on the projection of Kashmir dispute on state television.

Chairman Kashmir Committee Shehryar Khan Afridi directed Chairman Pemra and Managing Director of PTV to present a detailed briefing on the performance of both the state institutions to raise awareness on Kashmir dispute.