

# Traders term e-crime law anti-people

By Jamal Shahid

ISLAMABAD, Oct 29: Pakistan Software Houses Association (Pasha) on Thursday said Prevention of Electronic Crimes Ordinance (PECO) 2007 was "dangerously" more anti-people and industry alike than a solution to information technology-related crimes.

"Death sentence for simple life threats through emails is a lot more frightening than it sounds," said Pasha Chairman Faisal Khan at a press conference.

Regarding government's insistence on approval of the bill by National Assembly, Faisal Khan said, "The bill violates basic human rights. It does not promote but will destroy local IT industry. The bill can be misused to blackmail, seek vengeance and throw people in jails. It encourages cyber crimes." He insisted that the bill "is not in line with international laws".

Promulgated by Gen Musharraf in 2007, the bill created a number of criminal offences involving misuse of electronic data, equipment as well as systems and use of such data and equipment in commission of other crimes. The power to investigate and prosecute the offences under the bill was vested with FIA.

"The bill gave Federal Investigation Authority sweeping powers to pick up any one and detain him/her indefinitely," said Faisal Khan.

Speakers also highlighted that an "ICT Tribunal" was to

be created by the government to try such cases but the tribunal had not been formed resulting in extreme confusion and delays in bails of arrested persons.

IT, telecom, software, call centre industry and civil society had serious reservations over the bill on a number of grounds, they said.

"The biggest concern is that offences which can be very complex are vaguely defined and carry severe penalties. Cyber terrorism is broadly defined and carries "death penalties".

The draft Bill was taken up by the National Assembly Standing Committee on IT and Telecom where members also expressed reservations on numerous clauses, he said.

The industry and civil society feared that prime victim of such a poorly drafted law would be educated youth, internet users and IT professionals.

The industry and civil society demanded re-drafting the law, and it should be opened to public debate.

Drawing attention towards its ambiguous definition, Tahira Abdullah, a civil society activist emphasized that the government signed the Budapest Convention on Cyber Crimes to standardise the bill.

"It flouts basic human rights guaranteed to us in the Constitution," she said urging the government to promulgate privacy and confidentiality laws.