

## Call to review Prevention of Cyber Crimes Bill

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ISLAMABAD: Information Technology (IT) industry, software houses, call centres, internet service providers, telecom operators and civil society members have expressed their deep reservations over Prevention of Cyber Crimes Bill — presented in National Assembly for approval.

In a joint statement issued on Friday, representatives of Internet Service Providers Association of Pakistan (ISPAK), Pakistan Software Houses Association (PASHA) and civil society said the Prevention of Cyber Crimes Ordinance (PECO) 2007 was promulgated by General Musharraf in 2007.

“It has been re-promulgated since then and lately considered by the National Assembly Standing Committee on IT & Telecom.” Some of the committee members including

Marvi Memon, Anusha Rahman and others have also expressed their reservations over various clauses of the bill. But the government, ignoring their recommendations, placed the bill on the agenda of the National Assembly for approval.

Wahajus Siraj, spokesman for ISPAK, said their major concern was that offences, which could be very complex, were vaguely defined and carried severe penalties. “For instance, cyber terrorism is very broadly defined and carries death penalty.

The bill contradicts and overlaps the provisions contained in Pakistan Penal Code (PPC),” he said.

Salman Ansari, an IT expert, was of the view that the bill could be exploited against innocent citizen for misuse of their SIM cards by mischief and would lead to without warrant and bail arrest of the person on whose name SIM was

issued.

Tahira Abdullah slammed the bill, terming it a draconian and repressive law that would seriously compromise and infringe the fundamental rights of citizen. She said it was a known fact that email identity could be easily changed. So if someone sends a threatening email using another person’s email identity, FIA would go and arrest the person. By the time, the person proves his innocence and gets bailed out, he/she would have already spent months in jail for no crime.

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

They demanded public debate on the issue by all stakeholders and redrafting of consensus bill, which did not undermine civil liberties.