

Banning TikTok will not Preserve the Islamic Identity of Pakistan

News:

Video-sharing platform TikTok is now blocked in Pakistan after the country's authorities ordered it to filter its "obscene" content. The decision comes a month after a similar crackdown on dating apps, including Tinder. [1]

Comment:

On Friday Khan outlawed the video-sharing platform TikTok in the country after a "number of complaints from different segments of the society against immoral/indecent content on the video-sharing application" the Telecommunication Authority (PTA) said in a statement. The telecom regulator said that it had issued warnings to TikTok to moderate illicit content, but TikTok failed to comply with its stipulations. The prohibition on TikTok comes hot on the heels of proscribing American dating platforms Tinder and Grindr.

There appears to be three possible explanations behind the Pakistani government's efforts to proscribe TikTok. First, as part of Khan's drive to establish a Medina type state there is "a genuine desire" to bar immoral content from Pakistani media platforms. However, the selective implementation of this edict undermines this narrative. YouTube, Facebook, Netflix to name a few are not barred, and lewd content is widely available on these platforms. Additionally, Khan's government has made no effort to purge immoral content from a number of Pakistani dramas and films.

Second, it could be argued that Khan's government is under pressure to support American efforts to limit China's technological companies from gaining primacy around the globe. While this might be logically step to pursue in the West, in many parts of the Global South including Pakistan it makes no sense at all. Pakistan is already heavily reliant on Chinese infrastructure and technology. Barring TikTok might please Washington but it will not rollback Pakistan's dependence on Chinese technology that increasingly dominates Pakistani telecom sector, defense projects, nuclear plants and CPEC.

Third, it is more likely that the TikTok is perceived to be a threat to Khan and his establishment acolytes. The content available on Tiktok can be extremely critical of Khan as well as the army. If left unchecked, this may eventually erode confidence in the establishment that provides unstinting support to Khan. Hence, Khan's government and the army have muzzled a variety of print and electronic media outlets, instigated forced disappearance of critiques, and even threatened the so called opposition. Adding TikTok to this growing list is no big deal. Nevertheless, a close scrutiny of this reason appears deceptive. Anti-government and anti-establishment content is freely available on a number of online platforms, but none of these have been shut down.

Perhaps it is a combination of all of the above factors. Or more likely there is an identity crisis at the heart of Khan's government—a struggle between Islamic and liberal values. There is very little doubt that Pakistanis have grown more Islamic over the years, and yearn for greater Islamic content. The popularity of Ertugrul and the disdain over Khan's handling of Kashmir has only fueled the desire for the nation to adopt stronger Islamic content.

Within this context, Khan's liberal project to fuse Islamic and western values under the guise of Riassate Medina is bound to fail. Under the Khilafah Rashidah (rightly guided Caliphate) upon the method of the Prophethood, Western cultural values and foreign media content is automatically banned to preserve the Islamic identity of the people. The non-Muslims living in the Islamic State are not allowed to own their own media institutions - be it print, TV or electronic. After the Messenger of Allah (saw) established the Islamic State in Medina the Jews were not allowed to possess media outlets. Likewise, once the whole of the Arabian Peninsula fell under Islamic control, the pagan Arabs, Romans and Persians were prevented from possessing their own media institutions.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
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References:

[1] Deutsche Welles, (2020). "Pakistan bans TikTok for failing to filter 'immoral' content". [online] Arab news. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistan-bans-tiktok-for-failing-to-filter-immoral-content/a-55224770> [Accessed 10 Oct. 2020].