There are huge reservations by industry and civil society about the modifications the government has made to the proposed cybercrime bill. If passed in its current form (which is expected to be much worse than the version we managed to obtain, see below), it will impact not only users and business but also media in a big way. This needs urgent attention as bill can be passed in a speedy manner and which, as of Thursday (April 9, 2015), has been submitted to the National Assembly.

These are two articles that sum up the reservations:

Dawn: New cybercrime bill tough on individual rights, soft on crime

Tribune: Legislative bungling in a bill about cybercrime MOIT inserts clauses legalising censorship

More details:

We believe that we (Bolo Bhi) obtained a version of the draft the government has prepared. You can find the bill and our initial analysis of it here.

As of Thursday, April 9, 2015, we have been informed that a further modified version has been submitted to the National Assembly.

Section 31 is our biggest concern - among others. The government is adding this so they can justify their blocking and censoring powers – since the court has found they exercise these powers under no law (see timeline on IMCEW for more details)

Resources:

Advocacy posters to raise public awareness can be viewed here

Presentation delivered at T2F in Karachi on April 11 here

This post captures the impact it will have on users and the media

Bolo Bhi launched this online petition, the comments should give you a fair idea of some of the reaction to this law

Historical Background of the Law:

PECO (Pakistan Electronic Crime Ordinance) was promulgated by Musharraf in 2007. Since it was an ordinance, it lapsed in 2009. There was huge uproar against it because innocent people were charged and framed. It gave excessive powers to FIA (Federal Investigation Agency), which were abused.

In this timeline tracking cybercrime legislation and Bolo Bhi's resources on the cybercrime bill you will find the different versions of the laws and reactions and analyses of them.

Once it lapsed, there were efforts to revive it and introduce PECO as an Act. That is when the industry really got involved and started drafting their own version. ISPAK (Internet Service Providers Association) and P@SHA (Pakistan Software Houses Association) led this initiative.

Last year, there were meetings at the Ministry of IT & Telecommunications which members of P@SHA & ISPAK attended to finalize the industry stakeholder draft (please note though no civil society organization or members were privy to these meetings or drafts). This was then sent to the Cabinet Division. From there it emerged earlier this year with modifications. We were informed the bill was being presented before the National Standing Committee on IT for approval. This is what we with members of the committee.

After this, a sub-committee was formed to work on the bill further. Bolo Bhi held consultations with industry and civil society members, and technical experts - we were also in touch with the original drafters of this law. See also: Cybercrime Bill Must Not Be Approved In Current Form

The National Assembly's Standing Committee on IT constituted a sub-committee but since then only a government-led committee has been reviewing and modifying the draft. This was expressed recently by MNA Shazia Marri and Senator Mushahid Hussain in the presence of Minister Anusha Rahman on Hamid Mir's show, saying the bill has not been shared with them. Ask any MNA on the committee who does not belong to PML-N and they will tell you the same thing.

Parliamentarians in opposition have been kept in the dark about it.