

IT ministry to send notice to WhatsApp on international spam calls issue: Rajeev Chandrasekhar

By Aashish Aryan & Surabhi Agarwal, ETtech

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Synopsis
The digital platforms are responsible and accountable for ensuring the safety of 'digital nagriks', Chandrasekhar said, adding that the government will respond to every instance of alleged misuse or alleged breach of users' privacy.



The Centre will issue a notice to [WhatsApp](#) seeking to know the reasons behind the sudden spurt in [spam calls](#) on the instant messaging and calling app, the Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology [Rajeev](#)

Layoff Tracker

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[Chandrasekhar](#) said.

This comes a day after the IT ministry [sought a report from WhatsApp](#) on the alleged breach of privacy wherein the instant messaging and calling app was accessing the microphone of the user even when the app was not being used. WhatsApp has since attributed the issue to a bug in Android.

WhatsApp will also be asked to detail the preventive measures put in place to prevent such calls and messages, he said.

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“One of the problems we are looking at is how do these numbers get out? How are they (spammers) able to identify which numbers are on WhatsApp? Are they just doing it blindly or this is some database that they have? If there is a database, then it is a violation of privacy,” Chandrasekhar told reporters on the sidelines of an event organised by the Public Affairs Forum of India.

The IT ministry will also seek to know from WhatsApp if these spam calls were being done by bots who were sending messages and making calls by using random number generations which had a +91 pre-fix indicating they were from India, Chandrasekhar said.

A WhatsApp spokesperson said that the company’s policies were “aligned” with the government’s goal of keeping users safe.

“International scam calls is a new way that bad actors have recently adopted. By giving a missed call, they lead curious users to call or message back only to get scammed. Therefore, we have quickly ramped up our AI (Artificial Intelligence) & ML (Machine Learning) systems to bring down such incidents significantly,” the spokesperson said, adding that the new enforcement would

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cut down such spam calls by 50%.

“We expect to be able to control the current incidence effectively. We will continue to work relentlessly towards ensuring a safe experience for our users,” the spokesperson said.

Over the past few days, WhatsApp users have been inundated with spam calls originating from outside the country. Most of these calls have country prefixes of +62, +84, +254 and +251, indicating they originated from Indonesia, Vietnam, Kenya, and Ethiopia.

Responding to a question on the origin of the spam calls, Chandrasekhar said that it was the responsibility of platforms to ensure user safety and prevent any harm to them.

On Thursday, Chandrasekhar also said that the government was mulling guidelines on the permissions that should be available by default for apps that are pre-loaded on new smartphones.

The government was also hopeful of introducing the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill before the Parliament in the Monsoon session.

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Synopsis

This may help to further reduce the price on the open source network that is already challenging the duopoly of Swiggy and Zomato in the food delivery space.



Owing to the strong growth of orders on the Open Network for [Digital Commerce](#) (ONDC), [Paytm](#) may forego the 3% commission it charges as a buyer app on [ONDC](#) to further fuel customer participation in the fast-growing government-backed ecommerce platform, multiple people aware of the development told ET.

This may help to further reduce the price on the open source network that is already challenging the duopoly of [Swiggy](#) and [Zomato](#) in the food delivery space.

Paytm, one of the first buyer apps to go live on ONDC, plans to forego commission on orders fulfilled by sellers where there are no customer complaints, sources said.

This is significant considering Paytm accounts for about one-third of the total orders on ONDC. Other major buyer apps on the network include PhonePe and [Magicpin](#).

Also read | [Explained: ONDC vs Zomato-Swiggy and what it means for the food-delivery space](#)

ONDC CEO T Koshy refused to comment on the specifics of the scheme offered through Paytm, but told ET that various network participants will be coming out with different schemes to encourage establishment of the network.

Paytm did not comment on the matter.

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“There are three to four levers we can use to improve the adoption on the (ONDC) network,” said Dilip Vamanan, cofounder of [SellerApp](#), one of the 27 seller side aggregators live on the network. Seller apps are merchant-facing platforms that connect retailers with ONDC.

“Previously, the initiative that was taken was free delivery or incentives on delivery,” he told ET. “Every month, there is an incentive plan that is being executed. If a buyer app foregoes its commission and that can be given to the customer, customer adoption may become better. We can approach our sellers and ask them to reduce the commission from the selling price. This is already happening with Shopify.”

Cumulative retail orders on ONDC network reached almost 199,000 as of Tuesday, out of which 25,000 were added on Monday and Tuesday.

The last week or so has seen increased interest in the network after it was reported that food orders on ONDC were costing much less compared to Swiggy and Zomato. Food orders have also become dominant with a share of 70% among total retail orders on the network.

Previously, ONDC was offering an incentive of up to Rs 75 as discount to be provided for logistics for buyers on every eligible order. However, ONDC [sent a communication to seller-network participants on May 7](#), saying the incentive will be provided only up to a maximum incentive of Rs 2,25,000 per seller-side app per day, and a maximum incentive of Rs 3,750 per seller per day.

Previously, customers were not being charged for delivery for most hyperlocal orders, which is not the case after May 9.

ONDC has also been giving an incentive of Rs 50 to buyer-side apps such as Paytm and Pincode to offer a similar discount to consumers for orders above Rs 100. That has also been recently capped at 2,000 orders per day.

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