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WhatsApp scam calls issue: IT ministry to send notice to the company, Rajeev **Chandrasekhar says**

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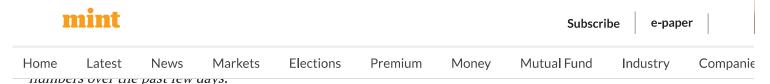


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Taking note of the issue of WhatsApp spam calls from unknown international n OPENIN APP Minister of State for IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar on Thursday said that the IT Ministry will send a notice to the company.

Asseting that the onus of ensuring user safety lies with the digital platforms, the minister said that the government will respond to every instance of alleged misuse or alleged breach of users' privacy.

WhatsApp users in India have recently reported a massive surge in receiving spam calls from international numbers over the past few days. Many took to Twitter stating that a major chunk of these spam calls had country codes belonging to Indonesia (62), Vietnam (84), Malaysia (60), Kenya (254) and Ethiopia (251).



"The Ministry is taking note of it, they will send them a notice," Chandrasekhar told reporters on the sidelines of an event organised by the Public Affairs Forum of India (PAFI). He also added that the government is mulling guidelines on what should be permissions for preloaded apps.

"I have said repeatedly that openness trust, safety and accountability are the responsibility of platforms who deliver to digital nagriks," the minister noted.

If there is an issue of spam, it is certainly an issue WhatsApp should look at or any messenger platform should look at, he added.

"Government will respond to every alleged misuse or alleged breach of privacy," he said.

"How are they able to identify which numbers are on WhatsApp...are they doing it blindly...is it some database they have got? If there is a database it is a violation of privacy, or if not are they are doing it through a bot... sending messages to random numbers... But that is certainly something platforms will be asked to look at," he said.



In a post on microblogging site Twitter, Chandrasekhar has stated that the government will investigate a claim that WhatsApp accessed the microphone of smartphone users while the phone was not in use. The government will examine the alleged breach of privacy even as the new Digital Personal Data Protection Bill was being readied, he said.

This followed a claim that WhatsApp accessed a user's microphone while he was sleeping.

WhatsApp responded saying it has been in touch with the Twitter engineer over the last 24 hours, who posted an issue with his Pixel phone and WhatsApp.

"We believe this is a bug on Android that misattributes information in their Privacy Dashboard and have asked Google to investigate and remediate," WhatsApp said in a tweet.



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We continue to provide several safety tools within WhatsApp like Block & Report, consistently build user safety education & awareness, as well as, proactively weed out bad-actors from our platform. However, bad actors find different ways to scam users. 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," WhatsApp spokesperson said in a reply.

"Therefore, we have quickly ramped up our AI & ML systems to bring down such incidents significantly. Our new enforcement will reduce the current calling rate by at least 50% and 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," WhatsApp spokesperson added.

To a question on some online gaming platforms opposing any idea of the self-regulatory organisation (SRO) backed by the association IAMAI, the minister said it has already been clarified during the consultation process that no existing industry organisation can be an SRO.

"SRO has to be notified by the Ministry, which means SRO has to be approved by the Ministry as meeting criteria laid down in online gaming rules. There will be SRO that

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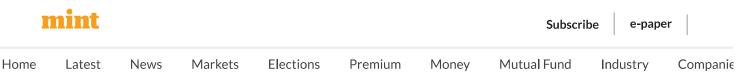
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