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Govt to send notice to WhatsApp on spam calls: Rajeev Chandrasekhar

The minister made it clear that the platforms are responsible for ensuring the safety and trust of users



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The IT Ministry will send a notice to WhatsApp on the issue of spam calls from unknown international numbers, Minister of State for IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar on Thursday said, asserting that the onus of ensuring user safety lies with the digital platforms.

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

The minister's comments assume significance as WhatsApp users in India have reported a massive surge in incoming international spam calls over the past few days. Many users complained on Twitter that a major chunk of these spam calls had country codes belonging to Indonesia (+62), Vietnam (+84), Malaysia (+60), Kenya (+254) and Ethiopia (+251).

Chandrasekhar on Tuesday said the ministry is taking note of the matter and will send a notice to WhatsApp on the issue.

"The Ministry is taking note of it, they will send them a notice," he told reporters on the sidelines of an event organised by the Public Affairs Forum of India (PAFI).

He also said that the government is mulling guidelines on what should be permissions for preloaded apps.

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The minister made it clear that the platforms are responsible for ensuring the safety and trust of users.

"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.

One of the problems being examined at this point is also how these numbers are accessed by scammers.

"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.

Chandrasekhar tweeted on Wednesday that the government will investigate a claim that WhatsApp accessed the microphone of smartphone users while the phone was not in use.

In a tweet, the minister had said the government will examine the alleged breach of privacy even as the new Digital Personal Data Protection Bill was being readied.

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.

The company also claimed that users have full control over their mic settings.

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 will be formed...100 will apply, and three will be selected based on who is most transparent, inclusive and who represents most stakeholders and who is more credible," the minister said.

On the draft digital personal data protection Bill, Chandrasekhar said he is hopeful that it will be introduced in the coming session of Parliament.

(Only the headline and picture of this report may have been reworked by the Business Standard staff; the rest of the content is auto-generated from a syndicated feed.)

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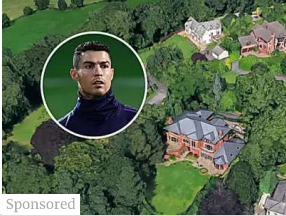


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