

Centre warns against data abuse

The Centre informed the Lok Sabha on Wednesday that it was up to social media platforms to weed out fake news, and it would come down heavily on companies found abusing data to influence elections.

Answering a question, Union Minister for Law and Information Technology Ravi Shankar Prasad said the Centre would seek the States' response to a proposed data protection law, and it desired an "elaborate discussion" before formulating such a law.

He said the government ordered a CBI probe into the alleged misuse of the data of Indian Facebook users by Cambridge Analytica, a British political consultancy firm. "Any foreign entity, Facebook or Cambridge Analytica, cannot abuse the data of Indians to influence elections in India. Indian elections are very transparent, sanctified."

The government told the social media platforms that fake news or abusive news could not be circulated and re-circulated to "create crimes", Mr. Prasad said. "Therefore, the origin of those news should also be technologically answered. I have made it clear to them that it does not need rocket science to identify lakhs of messages being circulated on a particular day, in a particular area of a particular State. You must have technological solutions."

His comments come within days of rumours on WhatsApp having triggered incidents of lynching.

Mr. Prasad said that while Facebook apologised to the government and said data was pilfered by other agencies, Cambridge Analytica gave just one reply.

Facebook had disclosed that the data of around 5.62 lakh Indians might have been potentially affected in the Cambridge Analytica case. "However, Cambridge Analytica responded that it does not have any Facebook data on Indian citizens. To a second notice, Facebook informed that Cambridge Analytica had violated Facebook's policy. Cambridge Analytica has not responded to the second notice."

He said the government asked the social media platforms to appoint a grievance redress officer in India before whom complaints could be made. "We respect privacy. But privacy cannot be used to shield terrorists and the corrupt," he added.

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