CYBER VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME ROLLED OUT, MHA INFORMS LS

Relevant for: Security Related Matters | Topic: Basics of Cyber Security and related matters

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) informed the Lok Sabha on Tuesday that a "cyber volunteer" programme has been rolled out for "cyber hygiene promotion" and the services of volunteers would be utilised by the State police as per requirement.

The MHA, through its cyber crime grievance portal- cybercrime.gov.in, aims to raise a group of "cyber crime volunteers" to flag "unlawful content" on the Internet. Various groups, including the Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF), have expressed concern that the programme enables a culture of surveillance and could create potential social distrust by encouraging civilians to report the online activities of other citizens.

Privacy matters

Biju Janta Dal Member of Parliament Pinaki Misra asked whether "concerns of infringement of privacy due to surreptitious and malafide intrusion into an individual's online activities are addressed in this programme and its operating protocol."

Union Minister of State for Home G. Kishan Reddy said in a written reply, "The challenges of cyber space are many which flow from its vastness and borderless character. ... Cyber Crime Volunteer Framework has been rolled out as an initiative as a part of cyber hygiene promotion to bring together citizens to contribute in the fight against cybercrime in the country and assist State/UT LEAs (law enforcement agencies) in their endeavour to curb cyber crimes. The volunteers will be enrolled and their services utilized by the respective State/UT Police Authorities, as per their requirement."

The Minister observed in another reply that the MHA had operationalised the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal on August 30, 2019 to provide a centralised mechanism to the citizens for online reporting of all types of cyber crime incidents, with a special focus on cyber crimes against women and children.

The reply said that as per the data maintained, since its inception, 3,17,439 cyber crime incidents and 5,771 FIRs have been registered up to February 28 in the country.

The conversion of complaints received into FIRs stood at 1.81%.

The Minister stated in a third reply that the government had approved the setting up of 1,023 Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs), including 389 exclusive POCSO Courts, for expeditious trial and disposal of cases related to rape and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

"As per published information, the conviction rate for the POCSO cases in 2019 was 34.9%," the reply stated.

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