

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY  
**RAJYA SABHA**  
**UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 2737**  
TO BE ANSWERED ON: 12.12.2019

**EXAMINING VULNERABILITY OF WHATSAPP USER**

**2737. SHRI JOSE K. MANI:**

Will the Minister of Electronics & Information Technology be pleased to state:-

- (a) whether India's cyber watchdog CERT-In had asked its emergency response team to examine the vulnerability of the WhatsApp user that could be exploited by a remote attacker to execute an arbitrary code;
- (b) whether WhatsApp users' accounts are globally breached by spyware and whether India has expressed concerns over the safety of the app;
- (c) whether Government has seen the expose of Chief of Telegram App alleging that WhatsApp exposes its user to serious vulnerabilities; and
- (d) if so, Government's comments thereon?

**ANSWER**

MINISTER OF STATE FOR ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY  
(SHRI SANJAY DHOTRE)

(a) and (b): It has been reported in media in the end of October 2019 that social media company WhatsApp has filed legal case against an entity called NSO Group for allegedly launching cyber-attack that exploited video calling system of WhatsApp in order to send malware to the mobile devices of number of WhatsApp users. It has also been reported that NSO Group uses spyware called “Pegasus” to steal information from infected mobile devices. WhatsApp mentioned on their website that impacted users have been informed about this attack. On May 20, 2019 WhatsApp reported an incident to the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) wherein it mentioned that WhatsApp identified and promptly fixed a vulnerability that could enable an attacker to insert and execute code on mobile devices and that the vulnerability can no longer be exploited to carry out attack.

CERT-In has sought details from WhatsApp regarding the cause of the incident. WhatsApp has responded mentioning that a buffer overflow vulnerability in the WhatsApp software code was exploited in this incident. CERT-In published a vulnerability note regarding the vulnerability in WhatsApp on May 17, 2019 and advising countermeasures to users.

The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) is tracking cyber threats affecting users and issuing advisories to users regarding best practices to be followed for protection of information while using Social Media and securing mobile devices.

(c) and (d): There are media reports indicating the Telegram founder's comments on WhatsApp vulnerability. As informed above, CERT-In has issued a vulnerability note in this regard.

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