

# Civil society pushes for privacy panel

Laxmi Ajai Prasanna | TNN

**Thiruvananthapuram:** Civil society organizations are pushing for a 'privacy commission' to provide protection to individuals from illegal breach of their privacy, with guidelines imposing penal sanction against the violators.

This assumes significance at a time when the Centre has decided to set up a judicial panel to probe the snoopgate scandal wherein the BJP government in Gujarat was allegedly involved in illegal surveillance of a woman architect and especially when the Right to Privacy Bill is pending in Parliament.

However, industry consortia, including CII and Ficci, prefer lesser regulation, though calling for a cautious approach.

Among civil society organizations pressing for a stringent privacy bill is the International Centre for Free and Open

Source Software (ICFOSS), the only representative from Kerala to attend the NETmundial conference held recently in Brazil. The meet focused on privacy issues to ensure basic human rights, including freedom of expression.

## PREVENTION OF DATA MISUSE

"NETmundial is the first step towards pushing for a privacy law against the snooping and spying on individuals by those in power, including agencies within and outside the country. Privacy guidelines should be clear as to what data can be collected without infringing on the dignity of an individual as 'data' represents the duration of a call, while 'metadata' reveals the content of the call," said ICFOSS director Satish Babu.

Bangalore-based Centre for Internet and Society (CIS), another NETmundial participant, also stands for a strong privacy law. "The two-day conference that concluded on April 24 was a baby step towards a privacy law with a road map for global internet governance. It is the first step towards a multi-stakeholder model offering an equal footing for all civil society organizations, academia, government, private sector and the UN fora," said CIS executive director Sunil Abraham.

"We are pushing for a privacy law in the country aimed at national privacy regulation and constituting a privacy commission on the lines of the information commission," he added.

However, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Kerala, vice-chairman Hari Krishnan R Nair said, "Before making a

database of the residents and collating it, voicing for norms will be like putting the cart before the horse. Though sensitive personal and biometric data, including fingerprint and iris scan, is collected for an Aadhaar card, it should be tempered at the right level with caution to prevent misuse."

While using technology to map data for national security and to prevent terror attacks, data verification should be through a proper caveat by a credible agency ensuring precautions by the government, he said.

Though calling for a cautious approach to prevent data misuse, an official at Ficci said that ensuring a proper database of the residents in the country will help ease the recruitment process in the industry and prevent hassles involved in police verification of an individual before enrolment.