Karnataka cyber cafes must keep records of all users

Our Bureau

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IN a bid to prevent misuse of the Internet, the Karnataka Government has made it mandatory for cyber café owners to maintain records of all users. Net surfers at cyber cafés would now have to prove their identity and sign up a form giving various details before they hook on to the Net.

If an identity proof is not readily available, surfers should be ready to be photographed by the cyber café attendant before they log on to the Net. According to the notification issued by the Karnataka IT Department, the images and records of the users have to be compulsorily maintained for a year.

The State Government, which drafted the Information Technology (Karnataka) Rules 2004, some six months ago, has started implementing it recently. "We are making the cyber café owners aware of this notification and are serving them with the copy of the IT Act so that they adhere to the law," said Mr Chandra Mohan Singh, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Cyber Crime Police Station, Bangalore.

"We would be meeting cyber cafe owners in Bangalore shortly to seek support for the new Act," Mr Singh said, adding the law was in favour of the owners, as it would help them to keep a tab on the Net users. "This is more of a preventive step as it helps us to locate the people misusing the technology. It also helps us to see that the cyber cafes are not misused for any illegal or criminal activity," Mr Singh said, adding that the Cyber Police would seek the help of local police in implementing this.

Failure on the part of the cyber café owners to adhere to the law could lead to impounding of licences by the police. It is estimated that Karnataka has over 10,000 cyber cafes across the State. The State Government's latest move comes after the Cyber Police found that many criminal acts, which include spamming people with pornographic mails were being done from the Internet cafes.

However, cyber café owners are not comfortable with the move. Speaking on condition of anonymity, small time cyber café owners said that this notification could turn into an instrument for police harassment. Moreover, they feel that this could also eat into their revenues going forward as this would restrict users.

Cyber café chains such as Sify's iWay already maintain a database of their members. "We have an online registration process for members, wherein all the basic details are profiled," said Mr David Appasamy, spokesperson for Sify.

When asked to comment on the recent notification, Mr Appasamy, "We need to wait and watch". Sify has about 135 cyber cafes, run by its franchises in Bangalore alone.

"As cyber cafés are going to become an important point of access to common man for many of the utility services such as banking, payment of bills, rail ticketing among others, the Government should

view and treat them on par with the post offices and the public call offices," he added.

Ms Sudipta Sengupta, Marketing Manager, Café Coffee Day, which runs a couple of cyber cafes at its parlours, said her firm already maintains a record of members login. "We are still looking into this notification and if needed, we will make the implementation more stringent."