

US blocks online fraud schemes linked to India

WASHINGTON - US officials on Wednesday said they shut down a series of so-called technology support scams, mostly operating from India, which tricked consumers into paying to clean their computers of bogus virus infections.

The Federal Trade Commission said a US judge has ordered a halt to six "scareware" operations and has frozen their assets following an investigation in co-operation with Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

FTC Chairman Jon Leibowitz said the schemes involved calls to consumers in English-speaking countries from call centres in India, informing consumers of bogus infections.

The groups also used online ads, which informed computer users of the infections, and then sold "fixes" at prices ranging from \$49 to \$450.

"In these outrageous and disturbing cons you get a call from someone pretending to be from a major computer company who dupes you into thinking you have a virus on your computer," Leibowitz told a news conference, which also played an audio tape of one of the calls.

"At one level, it's like a bad Bollywood movie, but at another level it's a rip-off."

The FTC identified six firms with deceptive commercial practices and other violations and asked the court to permanently halt the scams and order restitution for consumers.

The FTC cases targeted 14 corporate defendants and 17 individuals in six separate legal filings. The companies included Pecon Software Ltd., Finmaestros LLC, Zeal IT Solutions Pvt. Ltd., Virtual PC Solutions, Lakshmi Infosoul Services Pvt. Ltd., and PCCare247, Inc.

Canada's top telecommunications regulatory official, Andrea Rosen of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, said two related enforcement actions were filed in Canada.

Leibowitz said the FTC was sending a delegation to India to help work with authorities in such cases.

Source: *AFP*

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