

SHORT TAKES



FIGHT AGAINST VIRUS BACKED BY EU LAWS

Berlin, March 10: Europe's privacy rulebook does not create obstacles to taking action to curb the coronavirus epidemic but mass tracking of people's movements and contacts using smartphone location data would represent a clear violation.

Technophiles support the use of such data to reconstruct the movements of people exposed to the flu-like virus and identify others at risk of infection. Privacy advocates counter that this approach, used in China, subjects people to the kind of digital surveillance that has no place in a Western democracy.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) states that people's data is their own and requires anyone seeking to process it to obtain their consent.

Companies should take action to minimise both the risk of infection and violations of privacy. They can obtain information on whether an employee has travelled to a region with confirmed coronavirus cases, according to law firm CMS here.

Some systemic data collection may also be required, such as through workplace questionnaires or requiring staff to report their travel plans.

This is covered under Articles 6 and 9, which cover workplace health and safety, and using preventive or occupational medicine to address serious cross-border health threats. Employers are not allowed to take readings of the temperature of employees or visitors, nor can they require them to fill out medical questionnaires. — Reuters



Elon Musk

ELON DISMISSES CONCERNS OVER STARLINK

Washington, March 10: SpaceX founder Elon Musk on Monday dismissed scientists' concerns that his company's Starlink constellation of internet satellites would obscure the view of the night sky, predicting the network "will not cause any impact whatsoever in astronomical discoveries."

Musk is trying to seize control of the future internet space market and has already sent about 300 Starlink satellites into orbit — with plans to grow that number, potentially up to 42,000.

Scientists raised objections after the initial batch appeared as a train of bright lights shortly after they launched last year, arguing they were a death knell for both optical and radio astronomy.

Speaking at a satellite internet conference in the capital Washington, Musk said his company had already taken measures to reduce their reflectivity.

"I am confident that we will not cause any impact whatsoever in astronomical discoveries, zero," he said.

"That's my prediction, we will take corrective action if it's above zero." He said the issue only occurred as the satellites were "tumbling" as they raised their orbit, and that once they achieved their final flight path, the issue went away.

"I've not met someone who can tell me where all of them are," said Musk. "So it can't be that big of a deal." But he added SpaceX was working with the science community to reduce the potential for reflection, including painting the antennas black instead of white, and placing a sunshade on the satellites.

The system is due to go live in the northern United States and Canada later this year and expand to global coverage by 2021. Musk wouldn't be drawn on the cost to users, nor on precise speed, but said it would be enough to stream high definition movies and to play high-end video games without noticeable lag time. — AFP

Police seized some 1.9 million facemasks from a warehouse outside Surabaya on Monday, after Covid-19 sparked panic buying and sent prices for prevention products skyrocketing. — AFP

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