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Facebook skirts parliament committee's questions on sharing Indian users' data

No Answer To Posers On Tax Paid, Ad Revenues

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New Delhi: Facebook representatives were closely questioned over the social media giant's revenues in India, the taxes it has paid, data security aspects of the Jio deal, and whether it charges individuals differently, at a meeting of the joint committee of Parliament on the personal data protection bill.

Though FB officials Ankh Das and Bhairav Acharya ducked several questions, they found the going challenging, faced with probing questions from panel chair Meenakshi Lekhi, Congress's Vivek Tankha, BJD's Bhartruhari Mahtab and SP's Ramgopal Yadav among others. The officials said they would get back on subjects like revenue streams and taxes and said the issue of whether FB has been downplaying anti-Joe Biden posts will be addressed at an upcoming Congressional committee meeting.

The panel had summo-



TOUGH QUESTIONS: Ankh Das

ned Facebook on the issues of data protection and privacy. The representatives said between FB, WhatsApp and Instagram, the firm has over 90 crore subscribers in India. However, it could not answer direct questions about the amount of corporate tax it has paid over the years, its ad revenues, nor its policy for accepting ads.

Das, who figured in reports alleging she had failed to act against posts by BJP members, and Acharya deal with public policy for FB. India FB head Ajit Mohan has appeared before the House

panel on IT and separately said Das does not decide which posts to pull down. The issue did not figure in Friday's meeting.

Sources said while FB representatives said their ad approval team is based in the US, they would revert to the House panel on their earnings through advertising in India. The officials said there was a well established backroom to decide on issues that violate its codes but were quizzed on the apparent lack of pre-emptive screening. Yadav said the officials seemed surprised by the familiarity of the MPs with social media.

With reference to FB's recent Jio tie-up and the resultant questions about data security, the company assured the panel it will protect the privacy of Indian users, but resisted being termed a data fiduciary. It also skirted questions about whether it would share data of Indian users it holds when required by the State or another agency.

'Officials abroad', Amazon skips meet

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Amazon's decision to "decline" to appear before a joint committee of Parliament on the grounds that its officials were unavailable was strongly criticised by panel members and its head, BJP MP Meenakshi Lekhi, said a privilege motion would be moved against the e-commerce giant.

The panel on Personal Data Protection Bill had called Amazon on October 28, but in an email to the committee on October 7, Amazon's public policy head Garima Rathore said the company has decided to decline to attend the meeting and said "subject matter experts" were based overseas and could not travel owing to the risks involved due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Our subject matter experts are based abroad and

will not be able to appear for the deposition. We will, therefore, have to decline the request for this deposition," Rathore said in an email that breezily began with a "hope you are doing well" salutation.

The panel members were surprised at the response, noting the company could have sought another date. As a part of the deliberations on the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019, the joint committee has summoned a string of social media and e-commerce companies to hear their views on data security and privacy. On Friday, the committee heard depositions by Facebook India.

On the next sittings of the panel on October 28 and 29, the panel has summoned Twitter, Amazon, Paytm and Google. The joint committee of Parliament functions like a mini-Parliament when the House is not in session.