Karnataka wakes up to Blue Whale Challenge, to create awareness

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BENGALURU: The Karnataka government has finally woken up to the Blue Whale Challenge menace that is suspected to have pushed at least three teenagers to suicide in the country.

Though no such deaths have been reported in the state yet, the government wants to reach out to schools and colleges, besides educating the parents about the ill-effects of the game. The move comes close on the heels of the Centre asking internet companies to block links leading to the game. Kerala government had written to the Centre seeking its intervention after a teenager allegedly committed suicide.

With no jurisdiction to control sites that provide access to this challenge—it is popular even on social media platforms—the department of women and child development has decided to take the awareness route to prevent children and teenagers from falling prey to the game. The department is expected to reach out to parents and teachers among other stakeholders.

On August 19, 2017, women and child development minister Umashree had directed the department to take immediate action, and said: "The online game has proven to be a serious matter, claiming lives of several children and adolescents. In this context, there is a need to create awareness about this among children and their parents."

She has directed the principal secretary to use all possible media to create awareness.
The letter comes parallel to the instructions from the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) asking schools to install firewalls in all computers. "No such case has come to our notice in Karnataka. But that does not mean we are complacent and wait for things to happen. We have seen the kind of effect this game has on children. I will hold a meeting once I return to Bengaluru," Umashree told TOI.

The department will also involve other stakeholders like the departments of education and police. "We may even rope in sociologists and other experts, but no decision on that has been taken yet," she added.

The secret game

* Blue Whale Challenge, a global online challenge is derived from the beached whales phenomenon: where whales dehydrate themselves on the beach and eventually die.

* The online game involves the participant performing 50 tasks on a given day. The last task is to commit suicide

* The tasks range from cutting one's skin to watching disturbing videos

* Each task is expected to be a secret

* No participant, once committed is allowed to leave the challenge

* Reports say that the game first started in Russia and has now become a global phenomenon

* The game has already claimed lives in Russia, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, China, Columbia, Georgia etc

* In India, there have been at least three suspected cases in Maharashtra, Delhi and Kerala.