


Get App

- News
- Exclusives
- Leaders Speak
- Events
- Awards
- Webinars
- Brand Solutions
- More
- Satcom
- Data Center
- IoT
- Artificial Intelligence
- Industry
- Policy
- Telecom Equipment
- Devices
- More


ETTelecom Awards 2026

ETTelecom is organizing the fifth edition of the ETTelecom Awards 2026, which aims to...



ETTelecom 5G Congress 2026

The convergence of 5G, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT) i...



5G Corner

Your hub for insights - global roll

Internet 3 Min Read

Scammers target rural Indians navigating digital welfare system

But the real level of cyber crimes was likely "more rampant" than the official number. Osama Manzar, the founder of Digital Empowerment Foundation, a New Delhi non-organisation that trains rural Indians in digital literacy.

Reuters

Published On Sep 30, 2025 at 08:05 AM IST





Representational image.

By Kunal Purohit

JHARKHAND: A man posing as a government official arrived in Fatima Bi's village in northeast India three years ago and told her she was eligible for a subsidised cooking cylinder, but since she could not sign, he said she had to apply using her thumbprint.

Bi is one of millions of Indians who access their bank accounts with biometric data, but did not suspect when the man asked her to press her thumb onto a device. The man had already entered Bi's bank details into the system and used her thumbprint to clean out her account.

"Each time I pressed, he said the machine wasn't detecting it," recalled Bi, who asked for her name to be changed.

She ended up pressing her thumb eight times. After he left, she checked her phone and saw her account had been drained of some 24,000 Indian rupees (\$275) in eight transactions.

Such cyber scams are increasing in rural India. According to government data reported by the Indian Express newspaper, there was a 1,146% rise in reported cyber crime cases between 2021 and 2024. The government has not released this data since 2022.

But the real level of cyber crimes was likely "more rampant" than the official numbers, said Osama Manzar, the founder of Digital Empowerment Foundation, a New Delhi non-profit organisation that trains rural Indians in digital literacy.

WEBINAR**Road Ahead: Redefining Smart Infrastructure with Edge Computing, AI & Smart Metering**

Virtual Roundtable

Virtual Roundtable

Tue, 10 Feb 2026

Tue, 10 Feb 2026

Register Now**AWARD****ETTelecom Awards 2026**

ETTelecom is organizing

ETTelecom is organizing

Nominations till Fri, 06 Mar 2026

Nominations till Fri, 06 Mar 2026

Nominate Now**EVEN****ETTelecom Awards 2026**

ETTelecom is organizing

ETTelecom is organizing

Nominations till Fri, 06 Mar 2026

Nominations till Fri, 06 Mar 2026

Register Now

Manzar said more rural Indians were vulnerable to scams as more of them were using smartphones and because of the government's move to demand digital verification to access welfare services.

Indians lost some \$2.5 billion to cyber fraud in 2024, the Indian Express said, citing government data, an increase of 4,000% in four years.

In 2023, the number of internet users in Indian rural areas reached 488 million, surpassing the number in urban centres, data from the Internet and Mobile Association of India show.

Stories like Fatima Bi's are now common. In rural parts of her state, Jharkhand, nearly everyone who spoke to Context had experienced attempts to con them online.

A LIFETIME'S SAVINGS

Kerala-based private cyber crime investigator Dhanya Menon said scams often targeted villagers applying for government schemes.

"The value of these frauds is lesser in rural India, but such small amounts can be a lifetime's savings for some rural Indians," she said.

Wages in rural India have shrunk, official data show and debts have risen in recent years, according to a government report last year.

Menon said such distress made rural Indians more vulnerable.

In contrast to urban Indians "who fall for financial frauds in trying to grow their investments," Menon said, "rural Indians become vulnerable to them when they find themselves in a crisis, like when there is a crop failure, or when there is a medical emergency at home, or when there is shortage of food."

But access to government welfare schemes offering relief from such crises are often the lure scammers use. Menon said scammers were often armed with information gained from government databases and private banks.

"These scammers often know when a victim has applied for welfare benefits as well as things like a loan from a private bank," she said. "They use this information to gain trust from victims and eventually con them."

Sukeshwar Singh, the village head of Bhatko in Jharkhand said he receives at least one call a week from a scammer.

"From offering us farm equipment for free, to promising hefty monthly rentals if we agree to cellular towers atop our homes, there's a scam in everything."

Most Read in Internet

[Amazon plans nearly 30,000 corporate job cuts, may impact AWS, Prime Video & other units](#)

[Star AI researcher's new lab in talks for \\$4 billion valuation](#)

[Cybersecurity firm SISA to expand digital training initiative](#)

[Tillman Global Holdings to invest up to ₹60,000 crore in 1GW Maharashtra data centre](#)

Published On Sep 30, 2025 at 08:05 AM IST

See more on: [cybercrime](#), [scammers targeting rural Indians](#), [cyber scams in rural India](#), [digital welfare system in India](#), [smartphone literacy in rural areas](#), [online welfare schemes in India](#), [technology news](#), [International](#), [Digital Empowerment Foundation](#), [Internet and Mobile Association of India](#)