

Microsoft joins Google in US spying suit

AFP, San Francisco

Microsoft on Friday said that a battle to shed light on secret US government requests for Internet user data would play out in court after failed peace talks.

Microsoft and Google filed suits in federal court in June, arguing a right to make public more information about user data requests made under the auspices of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

The technology titans agreed six times to extend the deadline for the government to respond to the lawsuits, allowing time for negotiations that "ended in failure," Microsoft general counsel Brad Smith said in a blog post.

"To followers of technology issues, there are many days when Microsoft and Google stand apart," Smith said.

"But today our two companies stand together... We believe we have a clear right under the US Constitution to share more information with the public."

Silicon Valley Internet titans want to be able to provide users with better insight into what information the government gets its hands on.

The issue caught fire after Edward Snowden, a former IT contractor at the National Security Agency (NSA), revealed that US authorities were tapping into Internet user data, sometimes using national security letters that bar companies from telling anyone about the requests.

US officials on Thursday said they would begin publishing annual tallies of national security requests for Internet user data, but that step is not enough, according to Smith.

"For example, we believe

it is vital to publish information that clearly shows the number of national security demands for user content, such as the text of an email," Smith said.

He argued that, along with providing numbers of requests, disclosures should provide context regarding what is being sought.

"We believe it's possible to publish these figures in a manner that avoids putting security at risk," Smith said.

"With the failure of our recent negotiations, we will move forward with litigation in the hope that the courts will uphold our right to speak more freely."

"There has been a wave of legal action since revelations in the media about the PRISM program, believed to collect vast amounts of phone and Internet data as part of efforts to protect national security.

Suicide attack kills 6 in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

A suicide bomber killed up to six Afghans and wounded 20 others in an attack outside a bank in the southern city of Kandahar as people were waiting to collect their salaries, officials said.

He said both police and civilians waiting to collect their wages were among the victims. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack.

"Tragically, the initial death toll shows we have six dead and 20 wounded in this crowded part of the city, and most of the victims were civilians, and they came to the bank for their daily business activities," a statement from Kandahar media office said.

Kandahar police spokesman Ahmad Zia Durrani gave the toll as five people killed and 22 wounded, saying seven of those injured were police officers and the rest were civilians.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack. Afghan officials often blame Taliban insurgents, who are waging a nearly 12-year war against the US-backed government of President Hamid Karzai, for such attacks.

Southern Afghanistan is considered a hotbed of the Taliban insurgency, and the militants have a strong presence in Kandahar province.

Two troops dead, rebel camp overrun in Philippines

AFP, Manila

Two soldiers were killed in a firefight with communist guerrillas in the northern Philippines while in a separate clash police backed by helicopters stormed a rebel base near a mountain resort, officials said yesterday.

Up to 30 New People's Army (NPA) gunmen fought a two-day gunbattle with police forces near the resort town of Sagada, said Chief Superintendent Benjamin Magalong, the regional police chief.

"We used two ground-assault aircraft to neutralise snipers and improvised explosive devices at their camp," he told AFP in a telephone interview.

Sagada, which boasts caves, mountainside rice terraces and pine forests, is a town in the Cordillera mountain range that is popular with Western backpackers and local tourists escaping the tropical heat.

Destroy

FROM PAGE 16

"We understand the British Embassy in Washington met with the New York Times in mid-August - over three weeks after the Guardian's material was destroyed in London. To date, no-one has contacted ProPublica, and there has been two weeks of further silence towards the New York Times from the government," Rusbridger said.

Rusbridger added that, "This five week period in which nothing has happened tells a different story from the alarmist claims made" by the British government in a witness statement it submitted on Friday to a London court hearing regarding an investigation by British authorities into whether the handling of Snowden's leaks violated British anti-terrorism and official secrets laws.

A spokesman for the British Embassy in Washington told Reuters: "We are not going to get into the specifics about our efforts but it should come as no surprise if we approach a person who is in possession of some or all of this material."

The spokesman added: "We have presented a witness statement to the court in Britain which explains why we are trying to secure copies of over 58,000 stolen intelligence documents - to protect public safety and our national security."

A spokeswoman for the New York Times said the paper had no comment.

Taiwan train derailed by mudslides; 17 injured

AFP, Taipei

Seventeen passengers were injured when their train was derailed by mudslides in southern Taiwan yesterday after a tropical storm triggered widespread flooding.

The six-carriage train, carrying around 250 passengers, hit the mudslides as it was approaching a tunnel in Pingtung county, the Taiwan Railway Administration said.

"Heavy rains triggered mudslides and our train ran into the mudslides that caused four carriages to

come off the tracks, of which three have been stuck in the tunnel" said Lu Chieh-shen, deputy director of the railway administration.

"There was just a few seconds before I saw the mudslides ... it was raining very hard," train conductor Ho Cheng-hung told reporters, adding that his vision was also affected as the train had just emerged from another tunnel before the incident.

Three people were seriously hurt while the rest suffered minor injuries. Four of the injured were

hospitalised, including a 54-year-old woman with a spinal injury, the administration said.

The rest of the passengers were later put on another train and repair work was under way, but the administration said it was difficult to remove the carriages stuck in the tunnel in the bad weather.

Television footage showed repair workers in bulldozers trying to clear piles of rocks and mud covering the tracks as heavy rains continued to fall in the area.

Venezuelan gets 5.5 years for shooting US diplomats

AFP, Caracas

A Venezuelan court has sentenced a man to five and a half years in prison for wounding two US diplomats during a May shooting at a Caracas strip club.

The man, identified as Carlos Mejias Blanco, has "admitted responsibility," and faced charges of attempted homicide and illegal possession of a firearm, prosecutors said.

Authorities also had ordered the arrest of a second man, Windy Fabiani Mejias, who was present during the incident but is not believed to have been directly involved in the attack.

Dhaka for

FROM PAGE 1

sufferings of the Syrian people, both inside as well as refugees outside the country, it said.

About chemical weapons, it said Dhaka as a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, strongly condemns its use by any party under any circumstances.

"Bangladesh believes that resolution of the Syrian crisis, with the involvement of all concerned parties, should be able to address the aspirations of the Syrian people for a peaceful and stable country, ensuring national sovereignty, independence, national unity and integrity of Syria," said the statement.

US forces are also stationed at air bases in Turkey, and long-range bombers could eventually be sent from bases in North America.

France has warplanes stationed in Abu Dhabi and Djibouti, and naval assets in the Mediterranean.

More than 100,000 people have died since the Syrian conflict erupted in March 2011, and two million have become refugees, half of them children, according to the United Nations.

Residents were seen stocking up with fuel for generators in case utilities are knocked out by a strike.

Russia and Iran, and even some US allies, have warned against any intervention, also saying it risks sparking a wider conflict.

"Syrian government troops are on the offensive and have surrounded the opposition in several regions. In these conditions, to give a trump card to those who are calling for a military intervention is utter nonsense," he told journalists.

The Americans "say that they have proof, well, let them show it to the United Nations inspectors and the Security Council... If they don't show it, that means there is none."

Syria has denied responsibility for the alleged incident and has pointed the finger of blame at "terrorists" -- its term for rebels ranged against Assad's forces.

In Damascus, the mood had been heavy with fear, and security forces were making preparations for possible air strikes, pulling soldiers back from potential targets.

Obama's administration says it already has firm evidence that the regime launched a chemical onslaught that killed 1,429 people, including at least 426 children.

More than 100,000 people have died since the Syrian conflict erupted in March 2011, and two million have become refugees, half of them children, according to the United Nations.

Besides, around 1,500 people also gather at the Bangladesh consulate office in Dubai for MRPs. Imran said.

"We have already engaged various typing centres and a bank to ease the process," he said.

A Bangladeshi MRP costs 125 dirham (Tk 2,500) for labourers, and 405 dirham (Tk 4,500) for people doing other jobs.

Considering the influx of the MRP applicants, the embassy also plans to give the passport application services to a private agency, which might take time, he said.

The UAE had recently stopped issuing new visas to Bangladeshis holding the hand-written passports, the envoy said, adding that the renewal of existing visa was permitted though.

Newcomers to the UAE must hold MRPs, he added.

Four 'robbers'

FROM PAGE 16

On information, locals besieged the house around 4:00am, said Anisur, quoting villagers.

Sensing trouble, Ashraf tried to flee the scene, but locals caught him after a good chase, the police officer said.

They then gave Ashraf a good beating, killing him on the spot, he added.

Ashraf was accused in at least 10 cases, including abduction, robbery and extortion, filed with different police stations, said Khorsheed Alam, officer-in-charge of Hatiya Police Station.

Kefayat Ullah, an accomplice of Ashraf, was killed in a mass beating in Kadira Sluice Gate area around 12:00 noon.

Two other alleged robbers -- Osman and Sarwar -- were lynched in Mohammadpur area around 2:30pm.

Police recovered the bodies and sent them to Noakhali Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsies.

Anisur said the drive against the robbers would continue until the area is free of criminals.

In 2003, more than 60 alleged robbers were reportedly killed in a similar pattern at Subarnachar upazila in the district.

A list riddled with holes

FROM PAGE 1

Asked about Soheli, Nazem Asgar Rahman, teacher of the madrasa, said yesterday, "There are five students named Soheli at the madrasa. None of them went to Hefajat rally and none of them is dead."

Odhikar denied having anyone called Soheli on its list and said it would soon organise a press briefing to explain the whole matter. The organisation claimed the list the media got was not the one it had prepared. Prothom Alo online reported on Friday.

The Daily Star has gathered that Sekendar Ali of Katla village under Adamdighi upazila of Bogra, listed as dead, is still missing.

"Sekendar was at a mosque near Shapla Chattar during the police crackdown. He went missing after Fajr prayers early May 6. We searched for him in many places in Dhaka. We are still looking for him," his brother Azhar Ali told this correspondent on Friday.

Police say nothing about it.

Another listed person, Mutiur Rahman of Ukhiyaguna village under Ramu, got on the Chittagong-bound Mahanagar Gadhuli train after attending the Hefajat rally on May 5.

Around 8:30pm, as the train reached Comilla

Railway Station area, he and other Hefajat supporters got locked into a clash with some Chhatra League activists inside their compartment. Injured, he died at Comilla Medical College Hospital in the morning.

The list also includes Ataur Rahman and Lutfor Rahman, both with the address: Sutipara village of Phulpur in Mymensingh.

Ataur died in police shooting in Paltan area round 5:30pm on May 5, his uncle Motiur Rahman said on Friday. "One of his aides kept the body in a dark place near Islami Bank Hospital. We collected the body at night and brought it to village in the morning."

However, nothing could be known about Lutfor in Sutipara village. Relatives of Ataur too don't know of any Lutfor.

According to the newspaper's findings, some of those named in the list had died in daytime clashes. Hanif Paribahan driver Siddiqur Rahman, Abdul Wahab Molla and Ibrahim Khalil were among the victims.

Odhikar's list contains names of Shahadat and Anwar who died fighting with police near Hathazari madrasa in Chittagong, and also of Palash, killed in Narayanganj on May 6.

Hefajat's reaction Contacted, Hefajat's Publicity Secretary Harun Izhar admitted anomalies in

the list.

"Hefajat did not give the complete list to Odhikar officially. What Odhikar got was a partial list. Some of our responsible leaders gave it to the Odhikar officials. The list seems to be misleading," he told one of our correspondents in the Chittagong office.

He also admitted that the list had repetitions and included the names of those killed in the clash with police at Hathazari upazila in Chittagong. "As it is not our official list, we will not take responsibility for it."

Harun said Hefajat had the complete list but they would not publish it at this moment given the present "adverse situation". "We will publish it at a favourable time."

He added, "We are including one more point to our 13-point demand and that is the trial of the killers of Hefajat activists during the crackdown."

Several thousand activists of Qawmi madrasa-based organisation Hefajat-e-Islam, instigated and bolstered by Jamaat-Shibir members, ran riot, setting fire to shops and police outposts in the capital as the evening fell on May 5.

Hefajat had promised to hold a non-violent rally at Shapla Chattar on the day to press its 13-point demand, including introduction of a blasphemy law.

Democracy not within BNP yet

FROM PAGE 1

high command had to rely on radical Islamists, especially the Hefajat-e-Islam, in its attempts to oust the Awami League-led government. This earned the party widespread criticism.

The BNP is the first to be a ruling party by birth. It was formed to legitimise the country's first martial law regime following the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in August 1975 and the overthrow of his government.

Military ruler Ziaur Rahman formed the party in September 1978 through taking in politicians from various parties, including some anti-liberation forces such as Shah Azizur Rahman, who was installed as prime minister.

The BNP under Zia's wife Khaleda Zia made Matiur Rahman Nizami and Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, two top leaders of the anti-liberation Jamaat-e-Islami, ministers in her government in 2001.

The two are now on trial for war crimes. The party tied a knot with the Jamaat before the 2001 election. The knot remains.

Khaleda Zia has been leading the party for around three decades. Over the years, she has become the unparalleled and supreme leader of her party. She has plans to make her elder son Tarique Rahman the next chairperson of the BNP.

Tarique, now in exile in London against a back-

ground of corruption cases filed against him in Dhaka, is already the all-powerful vice-chairman of the BNP, a position he was given in December 2009.

The party has, however, faced some turbulent situations in the past.

After the assassination of Zia in May 1981, Vice President Abdus Sattar was elected president in November 1981. It was on his watch as president of the country and as chief of the BNP that the army chief, General HM Ershad, overthrew the government in a coup d'etat on March 24, 1982. After the ouster, Sattar became inactive in the party. At such a critical juncture, Khaleda, who had no experience in politics, was made vice-chairperson of the party in March 1983. She was elected chairperson on May 10, 1984.

Irked by her assumption of leadership, some BNP leaders, particularly Shamsul Huda Chowdhury and Dr MA Matin, who were foreign and home ministers respectively in the cabinet of President Zia, planned to split the party.

The party again faced a split in 1984, this one spearheaded by Shah Azizur Rahman. But the move did not succeed. In 1988, the party again faced split when the then secretary general KM Obaidur Rahman left the BNP and formed a new party.

But most party leaders and activists remained loyal to Khaleda and declined to

join the dissident leaders.

The BNP refused to join the 1986 parliamentary polls under General Ershad's government.

Like all other opposition parties, it also boycotted the 1988 parliamentary polls held under Ershad's government.

After the fall of Ershad on December 6, 1990, the fifth parliamentary election was held in February 1991 in which the BNP obtained a majority. With the support of the Jamaat-e-Islami, the BNP formed the government and Khaleda took over as prime minister.

The party again assumed power and Khaleda again became prime minister for a brief period through a controversial parliamentary election on February 15, 1996.

The BNP faced a turbulent time with calls for reforms in the political parties growing louder during the period of the state of emergency proclaimed in January 2007. The party faced a split. Then secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and some senior leaders, including M Saifur Rahman, formed a new committee of the BNP with the clear objective of pushing Khaleda to the sidelines and into irrelevance.

But their efforts failed. They only gave Khaleda more clout to run the party in accordance with her desire.