Cyber threat and security

TAPAN KANTI SARKAR

CYBER security is the ability to protect or defend the use of cyberspace from cyber-attacks, according to the National Institute of Standards and Technology, USA.

Of late, in Bangladesh, the financial services industry, which is a vital component of a nation's critical infrastructure, is under persistent threat.

There has been burgeoning growth of internet users in the country. According to Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, the number of internet users almost doubled in the last two years. It shot up from 30.48 million in 2013 to 58.31 million in February 2016. With it, came an ardent need for in-built cyber security in IT and to make people more aware about the policies, standards and guidelines.

The emerging role of IT governance is to bridge the gap between control requirements, technical issues and business risks. The Governance Global Practice of the World Bank supports governments in improving access and quality of public services by developing integrated governance solutions to address service delivery problems in their local contexts.

Improving public services requires making policymakers, public servants, and service providers accountable to citizens, and promoting citizen engagement and trust in public institutions.

Recognising the interconnections between institutions, service delivery, and citizen trust and engagement is especially crucial in fragility, conflict and violence settings.

The organisations undergoing change management become the easy targets of cyber criminals. Since 2011, Bangladesh Bank was busy modernising its payment and settlement system. The overall banking functions of the central bank had been brought under automation by implementing the banking application package.

All the offices and departments of the BB had been brought under a computer network, connecting around 4,000 desktops/laptops by 2012. During the computerisation phase of the BB, it might be that the things were done out of hurry. The main thrust was on meeting

The heist of Bangladesh Bank funds has brought the issue of cybersecurity to the limelight.   STAR/FILE

the World Bank's deadline. It was not possible to pay much attention to the security details.

Usually, this transformation phase of computerisation and change management remains risk-prone, as hackers take this chance of transition. They know that three important gears like security, monitoring and control might be lacking at that stage. The IT security of the banking sector in Bangladesh is in a very precarious stage and, hence, there are chances of further attacks.

In the last couple of years, CTO Forum Bangladesh has been addressing these critical issues. So far, it has organised as many as 15 seminars on cyber security. Its pursuits to make people aware are on. It is going to organise a conference on security jointly with

Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management this month.

Out of my 35 years of experience in IT, I have developed an impression that the organisations are never willing to invest in IT security until and unless they are targeted and fallen as victims. What is more important is to make the system bulletproof and to defend further attacks by raising awareness.

Creation of platforms for future cyber-security awareness raising efforts is important. Every day, in one way or the other, businesses are facing the threat of hacking -- phishing, ransomware, data breach and malware attacks.

In the country, there has been a dire need of a core group of professionals consistently

working on cyber threat intelligence, data protection and encryption.

In Bangladesh, the overall situation now calls for a cyber-security legal framework and that of an IT skill framework. It has to be a thorough assessment of the cyber security capacity, taking into account the existing capacity, availability of relevant skills training and education institutes, security companies, IT industry representatives, associations, professionals and multi-stakeholders.

It is usually said that as ICT investment continues to grow, the cyber-security profile must also be increased at par in order to enhance the effectiveness of technological capacity.

To be holistic in its approach to leverage

ICT, at this juncture, Digital Bangladesh has been trying new approaches, new innovations and new methodologies. These include, among others, the establishment of the digital connectivity project.

It is the highest priority project of the government and expansion of the government-wide network to its lowest tier is also important.

A survey from Security Lab has found that almost 73 percent of companies are relying on standard endpoint security-class solutions to protect their virtual environments, potentially leading to reduced performance and creating an excessive load on their systems.

About 34 percent of businesses remain unaware that specialised security products even exist. According to the findings of a recent survey, only 27 percent of companies use security solutions that are specifically adapted for virtual environments.

Of these, nearly half use agent-based solutions. Specialised agent-less and light-agent solutions are still uncommon, and are used in just 35 percent and 15 percent of cases respectively.

Kaspersky Lab is a privately owned entity operating in 200 countries, including Bangladesh. According to them, Bangladesh is one of the countries on the top hit list of impending cyber attacks.

Wire-transfer processes and other operations need constant screening. Clearly, the time demands for creation of a position of a cyber security officer (CSO) in financial entities, corporations, businesses, organisations and institutions. More than 80 percent of Bangladesh is now covered by wireless networks.

Now, as we make steps ahead, we make digital footprints. Bangladesh ranks 107 out of 139 in the Global Competitiveness Index, 115 out of 138 in the Networked Readiness Index (2011) and 134 out of 183 in the United Nations e-Government Survey 2010.

Finally, mobile, cloud computing, IoT (internet of things) and cognitive computing are expected to be the technologies that will shape the near future the most.

The author is the founder president of CTO Forum Bangladesh and can be reached at president.bcto@tksarkar.com.

Japan to support Mekong countries with $7b over three years

Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida (L) shakes hands with Thailand's Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bangkok on Sunday.   REUTERS

REUTERS, Bangkok

JAPAN wants to work with countries in the lower Mekong river basin and will help them improve infrastructure and bolster development with 750 billion yen ($7 billion) in aid over three years, its foreign minister said on Monday.

Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida made the pledge to help the Southeast Asian economies in Thailand's capital, Bangkok, where on Sunday he began a week-long visit to the region in which Japan competes with China for influence.

"Japan would like to work with the countries of the Mekong region to create a framework to support efforts by the Mekong countries in a detailed manner, on a region-by-region basis or on a theme-by-theme basis," Kishida said in a speech.

Japan announced the three-year plan last year.

China has offered billions of dollars in infrastructure loans and government aid programmes to Southeast Asian countries.

Kishida did not mention China in his speech. He is also due to visit Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam.

On Monday, he met Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, who has led a military government since the army took power in a May 2014 coup. Thailand has drawn closer to China since the coup which many western countries criticised.

Kishida and Prayuth discussed

Thailand's political process, regional terrorism threats and economic challenges, a Japanese official said.

Kishida visited Beijing on the weekend where both China and Japan expressed willingness to improve relations strained over conflicting territorial claims in the East China Sea.

In his speech in Bangkok, Kishida addressed maritime security and renewed a call for countries to respect the rule of law.

He also backed a Southeast Asian bid to draft a code of conduct for the South China Sea, where China's claim to virtually the entire sea clashes with claims to parts of it by Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia and the Philippines.

"We must establish a regional order whereby the principle of the rule of law is truly upheld and practiced," he said. "I would like to renew my call for the early conclusion of an effective Code of Conduct in the South China Sea."

Japanese Prime Minister Shinto Abe is pursuing a more robust foreign policy but Masato Otaka, deputy press secretary at Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told reporters Kishida's visit was not aimed at countering China's influence.

On Sunday, Kishida reaffirmed Japan's economic ties with Thailand, an important base for many Japanese companies, after Japanese investment in the country nosedived in 2015.

Greenpeace leaks US-EU trade papers, fears for consumers

AFP, Berlin

GREENPEACE charged Monday that a massive US-EU trade deal would place corporate interests above the environment and consumer safety, as it released classified documents from the negotiations.

The campaign group published 248 pages online to "shine a light" on the closed-door talks to forge a so-called Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which would be the world's largest bilateral trade and investment agreement.

"This treaty is threatening to have far reaching implications for the environment and the lives of more than 800 million citizens in the EU and US," said Greenpeace as it presented the documents in Berlin.

Both Washington and Brussels want the mega-deal completed this year before US President Barack Obama leaves office, but the agreement in the making has faced mounting opposition on both sides of the Atlantic.

In Europe there is deep suspicion that TTIP will erode social, ecological and consumer protections to the advantage of big business, while the US has also seen rising protectionist sentiment.

Greenpeace said the papers show, for example, that the US wants to be able to scrap existing EU rules in areas such as food labelling or approval of dangerous chemicals if they spell barriers to free trade.

"TTIP is about a huge transfer of power from people to big business," the group argued, having also projected an image of a classified text passage onto the facade of Berlin's parliament building.

In Brussels, Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstroem insisted that the papers "reflect each side's negotiating position, nothing else. And it shouldn't come as a surprise that there are areas where the EU and the US have different views".

"It begs to be said, again and again: no EU trade agreement will ever lower our level of protection of consumers, or food safety, or of

German Greens politician Hans-Christian Stroebele (C) reads classified papers from the ongoing US-EU trade talks, presented to the public by Greenpeace, near the Brandenburger Gate, in Berlin yesterday. Greenpeace published documents showing that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership poses "major risks for climate, environment and consumer safety".   AFP

the environment," Malmstrom said in a blog.

Greenpeace said the cache, a snapshot from ongoing talks, represents two-thirds of the TTIP draft text as of the latest round of talks in April, and covers a range of sectors from telecoms to autos to agriculture.

Germany's Sueddeutsche Zeitung daily, which received the documents early, said they indeed "show that the opponents' fears are not unfounded ... They show that the reality of the negotiations is worse than these dark forebodings."

The Munich-based daily said the papers show that the US side is trying to use the carrot of easing restrictions on auto imports from Europe for concessions on its agricultural exports, perhaps including genetically modified foods.

The Sueddeutsche -- the paper behind the publication of the so-called "Panama Papers" -- also charged that some political leaders who publicly defend TTIP "either don't know the status of negotiations, or are deliberately leaving

the public in the dark".

The newspaper focussed on a controversial TTIP proposal to set up private investor courts that would allow multinational companies to sue governments if they deem public policy to hinder fair competition.

While Brussels and Berlin had suggested, after strong opposition, that the investor courts are off the table, the newspaper said that "that was not and is not true".

Although the EU had made such a proposal, "the Americans flatly rejected it" and the issue had not been seriously negotiated yet.

TTIP is billed as a free-trade deal for the 21st century, focused on harmonising regulations, lowering barriers on investment, opening access to government contracts and addressing new areas like data trade.

Last week, Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel made a joint pitch for TTIP, saying it would spur much-needed economic growth.

Following the latest negotiations last month, US and EU said

they had made progress but "substantial work" remained to agree a deal in 2016.

They said that while 97 percent of tariff issues had been covered, three percent -- the most challenging, including for farm products -- remained.

French newspaper Le Monde, which also had access to the leaked documents early, said they showed that "the Europeans (are) more involved and more interested in negotiations" than the Americans, whose stance it described as "reluctant".

Greenpeace said the confidential documents prove that long-standing environmental protections are being ignored and that, for example, there is no mention at all in the proposed text of global goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

"These leaked documents confirm what we have been saying for a long time," said Greenpeace EU director Jorgo Riss. "TTIP would put corporations at the centre of policy-making, to the detriment of environment and public health."