

SPYING ON SAUDI CRITICS

US accuses 2 former employees of Twitter

AFP, San Francisco

Two former Twitter employees and a third man were charged in San Francisco Federal Court Wednesday with spying on Twitter users critical of the Saudi royal family, the US Justice Department announced.

The two Saudis and one US citizen allegedly worked together to unmask the ownership details behind dissident Twitter accounts on behalf of the government in Riyadh and the royal family, the department said.

According to a court filing, they were guided by an unnamed Saudi official who worked for someone prosecutors designated "Royal Family Member-1," which The Washington Post reported was Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Those charged were former Twitter employees Ali Alzabarah and Ahmad Abouammo, along with Ahmed Almutairi, a marketing official with ties to the royal family.

"The criminal complaint unsealed today alleges that Saudi agents mined Twitter's internal systems for personal information about known Saudi critics and thousands of other Twitter users," said US Attorney David Anderson.

"US law protects US companies from such an unlawful foreign intrusion. We will not allow US companies or US technology to become tools of foreign repression in violation of US law," he said in a statement.

The lawsuit comes as US-Saudi relations continue to suffer strains over the brutal, Riyadh-sanctioned murder last year of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.



Iraqi demonstrators carry away a man reportedly wounded by a live bullet on the Martyrs' Bridge (Jisr Al-Shuhada) during ongoing anti-government demonstrations, in the capital Baghdad yesterday. The United Nations chief Antonio Guterres denounced as "disturbing" reports that Iraqi security forces have fired live ammunition at anti-government protesters in Baghdad, as mass rallies continued to rock the capital and southern Iraq. PHOTO: AFP

China puts curfew on gaming for minors

China has imposed a curfew to limit the time spent by children playing games online, in the latest part of a government crackdown on youth gaming addiction. The regulations will mean those under 18 cannot play games online between 10pm and 8am, and for only ninety minutes at a time during the daytime. In addition, the guidelines will reduce the amount of money minors can spend online playing games to 200 RMB (\$28) per month, rising to 400 RMB for those between 16 and 18 years old.

'OK, boomer': NZ MP hits out at parliament age gap



With the quickfire putdown "OK, boomer", a 25-year-old New Zealand politician dismissed a heckler during a speech about climate change -- highlighting the generation gap between herself and other MPs in a clip that has gone viral. The catchphrase is used to dismiss out-of-touch, condescending or closed-minded attitudes associated with the baby-boomer generation and older people more generally. In recent months, "OK, boomer" has gained traction as a meme on apps like TikTok that have a predominantly young user base. Green Party MP Chloe Swarbrick used it to hit back at interjections while speaking this week in support of a bill to reduce New Zealand's greenhouse gas emissions.

E-cigarettes may damage the heart: study

Vaping devices and the chemicals they deliver -- increasingly popular among teens -- may damage the cardiovascular system, a study said yesterday, adding to a growing chorus of concern over injury and deaths related to e-cigarettes. The latest findings, published in the journal Cardiovascular Research, come after the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last month declared an "outbreak of lung injuries" linked to vaping. SOURCE: AFP

US calls for 'serious steps'

Pompeo urges all nations to reject regime's nuke extortion

AGENCIES

The United States yesterday called for "serious steps" to be taken after Iran resumed uranium enrichment at its underground Fordow plant in a new step back from its commitments under a 2015 nuclear deal.

Engineers began feeding uranium hexafluoride gas into the plant's mothballed enrichment centrifuges in "the first minutes of Thursday", the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization announced.

The suspension of uranium enrichment at the long secret plant was one of the restrictions Iran had agreed to in return for the lifting of UN sanctions.

"Iran's expansion of proliferation-sensitive activities raises concerns that Iran is positioning itself to have the option of a rapid nuclear breakout," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement.

"It is now time for all nations to reject this regime's nuclear extortion and take serious steps to increase pressure. Iran's continued and numerous nuclear provocations demand such action."

Iran's announcement that it would resume enrichment drew a chorus of concern from the remaining parties to the troubled agreement.

Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia have been trying to salvage the hard-won deal since the US abandoned it last year and re-imposed crippling unilateral sanctions, reported AFP.

Pompeo added that "Iran's latest nuclear escalations reflect the regime's intentions all along: to extort the international community into accepting its violence and terror."

"Members of the international community who are rightly concerned with Iran's latest attacks and provocations should imagine how Iran would behave with a nuclear weapon."

Meanwhile, European Union and United States yesterday expressed concern over Iran's holding of an inspector from the UN nuclear watchdog last week, with the US envoy to the agency calling it an "outrageous provocation" that must have consequences, reported Reuters.

Iran confirmed that it prevented the inspector from gaining access to its main uranium-enrichment facility at Natanz. Its envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency told reporters that it was because she tested positive for traces of explosives but then no longer did after going to the toilet while waiting for a further search, which prompted further investigation.

IRAN'S URANIUM ENRICHMENT

Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia trying to salvage nuke deal

EU, US express concern over Iran's holding of IAEA inspector



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (C) talks with workers during a general election campaign visit to the Tetley Tea Factory at Tata Global Beverages in Stockton-on-Tees, north west England, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

INTER-CASTE MARRIAGE

Indian couple stoned to death

AFP, New Delhi

Relatives of an Indian woman who married outside her caste and fled her home to escape punishment stoned her and her husband to death after the couple returned to their village to visit family, police said yesterday.

The 29-year-old couple, from the same village in the southern state of Karnataka, had married three years ago against the wishes of their families and moved to Bangalore and other cities in the region, and had two children.

But they returned to the village last month to meet family members.

"They were spotted by villagers on Wednesday, who informed the brother of the woman after which he gathered a mob that attacked the couple and killed them with stones," local police officer Guru Shanth told AFP.

ICC sentences Congolese rebel chief to 30 yrs in jail

HRW welcomes the prison term

AFP, The Hague

The International Criminal Court (ICC) yesterday sentenced Congolese rebel chief Bosco "Terminator" Ntaganda to 30 years in jail for war crimes and crimes against humanity, the highest ever penalty issued by the tribunal.

Ntaganda was convicted in July of offences including murder, sexual slavery and using child soldiers in a mineral-rich region of the Democratic Republic of Congo in the early 2000s.

Most of the charges against Rwandan-born Ntaganda, 46, related to a series of gruesome massacres of villagers carried out by his fighters.

"Murder was committed on a large scale," presiding judge Robert Flemer said, adding that the Hague-based court had taken the "particular cruelty" of some of Ntaganda's actions into account. "The overall sentence imposed on you shall therefore be 30 years of imprisonment."

But while the judges gave him the maximum sentence allowed by the ICC in

terms of the number of years, they said that "despite their gravity" his crimes did not warrant a full-life prison term.

Ntaganda, dressed in a blue suit and shirt and wearing a red tie, showed no emotion as the sentence was passed in the high-security courtroom.

An ICC spokesman confirmed it was the heaviest ever sentence handed down to date by the court, which was set up in 2002 to try the world's worst crimes.

Ntaganda has appealed against his conviction earlier this year on 13 counts of war crimes and five of crimes against humanity -- which saw him become the first to be convicted by the ICC of sexual enslavement.

Human Rights Watch welcomed the prison term.

"Bosco Ntaganda's 30-year sentence sends a strong message that even people considered untouchable may one day be held to account," said Ida Sawyer, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Africa division.

"While his victims' pain cannot be erased, they can take some comfort in seeing justice prevail."



Nato alliance is brain dead, says Macron

AFP, Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron said he believed Nato was undergoing "brain death," lamenting a lack of coordination between Europe and the United States and unilateral action in Syria by key member Turkey, in an interview published yesterday.

"What we are currently experiencing is the brain death of Nato," Macron told The Economist magazine.

The president's explosive comments, appearing to question the very future of Nato, threatened to send shock waves through the alliance ahead of a summit in Britain next month.

"You have no coordination whatsoever of strategic decision-making between the United States and its Nato allies. None," said Macron.

"You have an uncoordinated aggressive action by another Nato ally, Turkey, in an area where our interests are at stake," he added, according to an English transcript released by The Economist.

Turkey's latest military operation against Kurdish forces in northern Syria was staunchly opposed by fellow members like France, but made possible by a withdrawal of US forces ordered by President Donald Trump.

"There has been no Nato planning, nor any coordination," Macron said.

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