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Alarmed over U.S. snooping project, cyber world wants government to act

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This has led to complete compromise of Indian users' privacy: ISPAI

U.S. President Barack Obama's admission that his spy agencies were tapping into servers of some leading Internet giants like Facebook and Google to get access to accounts of foreigners (including Indians), has shocked the cyberspace community in the country. It has asked the Union government to take up the matter with the U.S. government as it related to privacy of its citizens.

Alarmed over the development, the Internet Service Providers' Association of India (ISPAI) now plans to meet Telecom, IT and Law Minister Kapil Sibal to impress upon him the need to ask companies based out of the U.S. or other countries to have servers in India so that privacy of users could be protected. It will also discuss with the National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI), whose role is to facilitate handing over of domestic Internet traffic between the peering ISP members rather than using servers in the U.S. or elsewhere. ISPAI President Rajesh Chharia told *The Hindu* that the expose by *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* about the U.S. programme code-named 'PRISM' in which the NSA and the FBI agents were tapping into the servers of nine U.S. Internet giants, including Facebook, Google, YouTube and Apple has led complete compromise of the Indian users' privacy.

"All assurances from these companies about users' privacy is a sham. We need to build pressure on these companies to follow the same code of conduct that they are following for their government...We also need to start an awareness programme along with civil societies on double talk of a few social networking sites as they have lost all credibility and locus standi on their position of customers privacy. The entire foreign userbase is under 'PRISM' as reported by media," he said.

Mr. Chharia also said it was time for ISPAI and NIXI to take a lead in their respective spaces on issues related to the Internet and genuine freedom of speech on Internet. "We should recommend to the government to insist on local hosting and technology only as that would help our business more...We as an ISP, as associations, won't protect privacies of our users from international agencies who would do it, especially people are saying that government has not done it. We have to play the role at national and international platforms till these companies become sensible of not putting our users in trouble," he added.

Google, Facebook

deny role

On the other hand, Internet giants like Google and Facebook have denied their role in the PRISM project. "Facebook is not and has never been part of any program to give the U.S. or any other government direct access to our servers. We have never received a blanket request or court order from any government agency asking for information or metadata in bulk...And if we did, we would fight it aggressively. We hadn't even heard of PRISM before yesterday," Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg said in a post on his profile on the social networking website.

Similarly, Google Co-founder and CEO Larry Page and Chief Legal Officer David Drummond wrote on their official blog: "First, we have not joined any program that would give the U.S. government or any other government direct access to our servers. Indeed, the U.S. government does not have direct access or a 'back door' to the information stored in our data centres. We had not heard of a program called PRISM until yesterday."

- ***Need to ask companies based out of other countries to have servers in India***
- ***'We should recommend to the govt. to insist local hostings and technology only'***