



# NSA snooped on Belgium phone company: report

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM: Belgian telecom giant Belgacom said on Monday its network had suffered an "intrusion" which a media report blamed on the US National Security Agency (NSA) as it snooped on communications in Africa and the Middle East.

Federal prosecutors said Monday that state-owned Belgacom had filed a complaint in July for "non-authorised access" to its servers.

Prosecutors said the hacking could have only been done by an entity "with significant financial and logistical means" and that suspicions were circling on an act of "international state espionage."

On the basis of the information so far, the aim was probably "to gather strategic information and not towards sabotage or to cause economic damage," the prosecutors said.

In response, the Belgian government said Monday that if the involvement of a foreign government was confirmed, "appropriate action would be taken."

Belgian newspaper De Standaard reported Monday that the intrusion, which it said began in 2011 at the latest, was the work of the NSA, but without revealing its sources for the charge.

The allegation is in line with revelations by Edward Snowden, a former NSA contractor, that the US has systematically gathered vast amounts of Internet and telephone data around the world.

This included covert surveillance by the NSA of EU offices, including diplomatic missions in Washington and at the United Nations in New York, as well as at its Brussels headquarters.

According to the newspaper, the real target of the snooping was BICS, a unit of Belgacom also owned by Swisscom and MTN, the South African operator.

BICS operates huge volumes of phone and data traffic in Africa and the Middle East. The United States was especially interested in communications involving Yemen, Syria, and other nations deemed suspicious by Washington security agencies, the newspaper said.

Source: AFP, via I-Net Bridge

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