

UK Defense Ministry Targeted in Massive Cyberattack



The UK's defense ministry has come under a cyberattack involving the names and banking details of members of the armed forces.

LONDON (Dispatches) -- Britain's defense ministry has been the target of a large-scale cyberattack involving the names and banking details of members of the armed forces, a government minister confirmed on Tuesday.

Work and pensions minister Mel Stride said the attack was on a system run by an outside firm but was still a "very significant matter".

Former minister Tobias Ellwood said a third-party payroll system used by the defense ministry had been targeted and bore the hallmarks of a

Chinese cyberattack.

"Targeting the names of the payroll system and service personnel's bank details, this does point to China because it can be as part of a plan, a strategy to see who might be coerced," the ex-soldier and former chairman of a parliamentary defense committee, told BBC radio.

Beijing hit back at the claims from Ellwood, a China hawk who has publicly criticized Beijing.

"The remarks by relevant British politicians are utter nonsense," foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian

said.

"China has always firmly opposed and cracked down on all types of cyberattacks." The data breach is believed to have also included in some cases personal addresses of serving and former armed forces members.

Stride told Sky News television, which first reported the breach, that the defense ministry had acted "very swiftly" to take the database off line.

But the government was not currently pointing the finger at Beijing, he said.

"That is an assumption.... we are not saying that at this precise moment," he added.

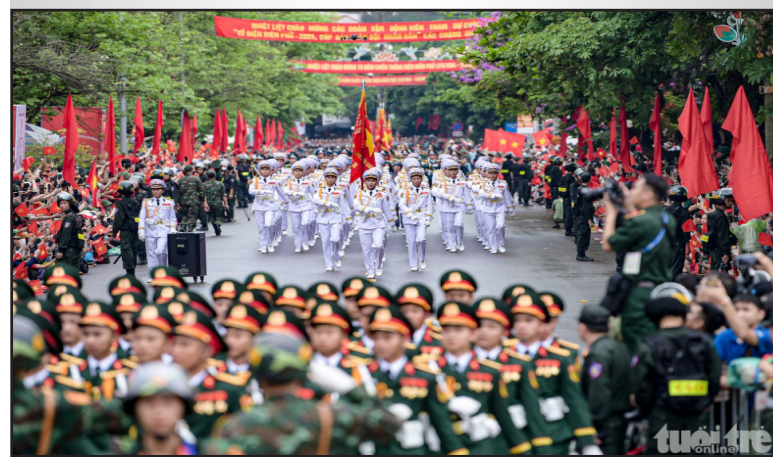
The data breach comes after the UK government in March accused China of targeting the Electoral Commission watchdog and the email accounts of lawmakers.

The Electoral Commission attack was identified in October 2022, but the hackers had first been able to access the commission's systems for more than a year.

China hit back at the saying the claims were "maliciously riser".

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is under pressure to take a tougher line on China, and last month announced a hike in the country's military budget to guard against what it views as new and emerging threats.

Vietnam Marks End to French Empire With Huge Parade



Armed forces parade in formation at a ceremony to mark the 70th anniversary of the Dien Bien Phu Victory in Dien Bien Province, northern Vietnam, May 7, 2024.

DIEN BIEN PHU, Vietnam (AFP) -- A crowd of more than 10,000 people including war veterans and dignitaries gathered Tuesday in Vietnam's Dien Bien Phu to mark the 70th anniversary of the battle that ultimately brought an end to the French empire in Indochina.

Outside the city stadium where official commemorations were held, throngs of people -- many wearing traditional Vietnamese dress -- lined the streets to watch a huge military parade. They cheered on soldiers marching with Vietnamese flags.

Vietnam invited for the first time a government minister from the former colonial power to attend the celebrations, which featured 21 rounds of fireworks and a display by 11 helicopters carrying the Communist Party and national flags.

French Defense Minister Sebastien Lecornu and Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh were among those at the event that drew huge attention from tourists and residents of northwestern Dien Bien province, which borders Laos.

As celebrations began in Dien Bien Phu city's stadium, 90-year-old veteran Pham Duc Cu spoke on behalf of his fallen comrades.

"It moves me to remember the people who died to achieve this earth-shaking victory," he said. "The war has passed. We are so proud to

have contributed to making a heroic and beautiful Dien Bien."

In his opening speech, Prime Minister Chinh said the battle of Dien Bien Phu represented a "victory for justice", marking the collapse of colonialism.

"Many martyrs cannot be identified," he said. "Their blood in this northwestern area was shed for our happiness today."

In a symbol of the Viet Minh's staggering feat of military logistics -- whereby they transported heavy weaponry in pieces hundreds of kilometers through the jungle -- the parade featured around 40 heavily laden bicycles pushed by gun-carrying soldiers.

France surrendered to the attacking Viet Minh on May 7, 1954, putting an end to 56 days of shelling and hand-to-hand combat.

Around 13,000 people were reported dead or missing during the conflict, including 10,000 from the Viet Minh side.

The French force -- about 15,000 men of many nationalities -- had underestimated the firepower of the communist forces, who managed to install artillery on the hills overlooking the French camp.

Their victory later led to the Geneva Accords on July 21, 1954, which marked the end of almost a century of French domination in Indochina and the partition of Vietnam, a prelude to future American involvement.

Russia Threatens to Strike British Military Facilities



An Iskander missile in Russia, which is preparing to "practise the issues of preparation and use of non-strategic nuclear weapons".

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- Russia has threatened to strike British military facilities and ordered its military to hold battlefield nuclear weapons drills in a move the Kremlin described as a response to comments from the French president, Emmanuel Macron, on western troops fighting in Ukraine and from the British foreign secretary, David Cameron, on using British-supplied weapons against Russia.

The Russian defense ministry said in a statement that troops from the southern military district would "practise the issues of preparation and use of non-strategic nuclear weapons ... in response to provocative statements and threats by certain western officials against the Russian Federation."

The announcement came days after Macron said he would "not rule out" the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine and Cameron said it was up to Kyiv how it used British weapons, including against targets inside of Russia.

The UK ambassador, Nigel Casey, and his French counterpart in Moscow were summoned by the Kremlin.

The Russian foreign ministry issued a formal protest to Casey over Cameron's recent statements that Ukraine had the right to use British weapons to strike inside Russia.

It said that the remarks made the UK a defacto party to the conflict. The statement came after a Ukrainian strike on Iskander short-range ballistic missile systems stationed in the annexed Crimean peninsula.

"Casey was warned that in response to Ukrainian attacks on Russian territory with British weapons, any British military facilities and equipment on the territory of Ukraine and abroad" could be targeted, the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement.

"The ambassador was called upon to reflect on the inevitable catastrophic consequences of such hostile steps by London and immediately refute the belligerent provocative statements of the head of the Foreign Office in the most decisive and unambiguous way."

The Russian foreign ministry also said that Russia would develop new intermediate and short-range missiles, claiming that the decision was spurred by reports that the U.S. was moving similar missile systems to Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.

Russia also defended its veto of a UN resolution urging all nations to prevent a nuclear arms race in outer space, challenging the U.S., Japan and their Western allies to support Moscow's rival resolution calling for a ban on all weapons in space "for all time."

Russia's UN ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, said the United States and Japan, which sponsored the vetoed resolution, are guilty of "hypocrisy and double standards." He accused the U.S. and Western nations more broadly of planning for the military exploration of outer space, including the deployment of weapons, in particular "strike combat systems."

News in Brief

TOKYO (Reuters) -- Japan has described as "regrettable" U.S. President Joe Biden's comment that "xenophobia" is stifling the Asian nation's economic growth, the top government spokesperson said on Tuesday.

Last week Biden said "xenophobia" in economies from China to Japan and India was hobbling their growth, while arguing at a Washington fund-raising event that migration has been good for the U.S. economy. "We lodged representations to the United States that the comment was not based on the correct understanding of Japan's policy and regrettable," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi told a regular news conference, without elaborating. Japan, which prides its homogeneity, has long been reticent about immigration, although its falling birthrates and a rapidly ageing population point to an acute labor shortage in the coming decades. Asked in a Newsweek interview published last week if he was interested in encouraging immigration to reverse the population decline, Kishida said Japan must consider inviting skilled workers, but ruled out a full-fledged immigration program.

WARSAW (Reuters) -- Polish security agents have discovered bugging devices in a room where ministers were due to meet on Tuesday, authorities said, without revealing who might have placed them there. As a hub for Western military supplies to Ukraine during the more than two-year war with Russia, Poland has been on heightened alert for spying. "The State Protection Service, in cooperation with the Internal Security Agency, eavesdropped and dismantled devices that could be used for eavesdropping in the room where the meeting of the Council of Ministers is to be held today in Katowice," security services spokesperson Jacek Dobrzynski wrote on X.

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) -- Chinese leader Xi Jinping's visit to European ally Serbia on Tuesday fell on a symbolic date: the 25th anniversary of the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade during NATO's air war over Kosovo. U.S. jets dropped five bombs on the Chinese Embassy compound in the Serbian capital on May 7, 1999, setting it ablaze and killing three Chinese nationals. Twenty other people were injured in the incident, which has burdened relations between the two powers ever since. Angry protesters in China stormed U.S. diplomatic installations as the bombing fueled anti-American sentiments and speculation that the attack was intentional rather than accidental. Mistrust over the incident has endured to this day. While straining Beijing's relations with the U.S., the embassy bombing brought China and Serbia closer together. China has emerged as Serbia's largest provider of foreign direct investment and its second-largest trading partner after the European Union. Xi arrived from France and will proceed from Serbia to Hungary as part of his first European tour in five years. He was expected to visit the site of the former embassy on the anniversary date and pay his respects to the bombing victims.

BERLIN (Guardian) -- The soaring cost of doner kebabs has led to growing calls in Germany for a government subsidy program to keep the inflation-hit dish, one of the country's favorites, affordable as politicians report it is frequently cited as a concern in doorstep conversations with voters. The chancellor, Olaf Scholz, has become so used to being asked about the price of kebabs during public appearances that his government has even posted on social media to explain that price rises are in part due to rising wage and energy costs. The far-left Die Linke party has become the latest to seize on the topic, calling, in a proposal it wants to present to parliament, for the introduction of a Dönerpreisbremse or doner kebab price cap, similar to that introduced in some parts of the country to control high rents. It says kebabs are already €10 (£8.60) in some cities, rising from €4 just two years ago. Deniz, a doner seller at a kiosk near Berlin's Friedrichstrasse station, said, "We have been forced to push up the price, due to exploding rent, energy and food prices."

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) -- The number of fish on the government's overfishing list sunk to a new low last year in a sign of healthy U.S. fisheries, federal officials said. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration released an updated analysis of American fisheries late last week via its annual "Status of the Stocks" report, which provides an assessment of the populations of the seafood species fishermen catch and customers buy. The report states that 94% of fish stocks are not subject to overfishing, which is slightly better than a year ago. NOAA's report arrives as international governments and non-governmental organizations have tried to crack down on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing around the worldwide ocean. In Europe, the European Commission has worked to prioritize deterring unsustainable fishing practices.

MOSCOW (AFP) -- Russia said Tuesday that it will hold an American soldier detained in the far east over the weekend in custody until early July on theft charges. The U.S. Army said the soldier, identified by a court in the city of Vladivostok as Gordon Black, had been detained on criminal charges but withheld details citing the sensitivity of the case. The detention of Black adds to the number of Americans held in Russia at a time of deep tensions with Washington over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Court spokeswoman Elena Oleneva said Black, who was detained on May 2, would be held until July 2 for theft, according to comments carried by the state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

Indians Vote in Third Phase as Modi Escalates Anti-Muslim Rhetoric



An Iskander missile in Russia, which is preparing to practise nd use of non-strategic nuclear weapons'

NEW DELHI (AP) -- Millions of Indian voters across 93 constituencies cast ballots on Tuesday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi has mounted an increasingly shrill election campaign, ramping up polarizing rhetoric in incendiary speeches that have targeted the Muslim minority.

In recent campaigns, Modi has called Muslims "infiltrators" and said they "have too many children," referring to a Hindu nationalist trope that Muslims produce more children with the aim of outnumbering Hindus in India. He has also accused the rival Indian National Congress party of scheming to "loot" wealth from the country's Hindus and redistribute it among Muslims, who comprise 14% of India's more than 1.4 billion

people.

Tuesday's polling in the third round of multi-phase national elections has crucial seats up for grabs in states including Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. Most polls predict a win for Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party, which is up against a broad opposition alliance led by the Congress and powerful regional parties. The staggered election will run until June 1 and votes will be counted on June 4.

Modi, who voted in western Ahmedabad city on Tuesday, had kicked off his campaign with a focus on economic progress, promising he would make India a developed nation by 2047. But in recent weeks, he and the ruling BJP have doubled down heavily on their Hindu nationalism

platform, with Modi employing some of his most divisive rhetoric in his decade in power.

Analysts say the change in tone comes as the BJP aims to clinch a supermajority or two-thirds of the 543 seats up for grabs in India's lower Parliament by consolidating votes among the majority Hindu population, who make up 80%. They say Modi's party is also ratcheting up polarizing speeches to distract voters from larger issues, like unemployment and economic distress, that the opposition has focused on.

While India's economy is among the world's fastest growing, many people face growing economic stress. The opposition alliance hopes to tap into this discontent, seeking to galvanize voters on issues like high unemployment, inflation, corruption and low agricultural prices, which have driven two years of farmers' protests.

"The mask has dropped, and I think it is political compulsions that have made them do this," said Ali Khan Mahmudabad, a political science professor at New Delhi's Ashoka University.

He said Modi's party had counted on getting votes from the fervor over a Hindu temple that was built atop a razed mosque that Modi opened in January. Many saw the glitzy spectacle as the unofficial start of his election campaign.

Man Found Nailed to Fence in Northern Ireland

BELFAST (Guardian) -- There has been widespread condemnation of an attack on a man who was found nailed to a fence in a car park in Bushmills, County Antrim.

The victim, in his 20s, was discovered with nails in both hands and injuries to his nose in the Dundarave Park area. He was taken to hospital for treatment in the early hours of Sunday.

Two vans, one belonging to the injured man, were found on fire nearby and crews from the Northern Ireland fire and rescue service were called to the scene. Graffiti on the wall of public toilets in the vicinity was being linked to the violent attack and arson.

About 20 visitors in campervans and mobile homes were reported to have been in the area at the time of the assault.

Some local people said privately they believed loyalist paramilitaries were responsible.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland said the victim of the "brutal" and "sinister" attack had been left with life-changing but not life-threatening injuries.

The PSNI also said paramilitary involvement was one of the lines of inquiry being investigated.

It called on anyone with information or video footage to contact them as part of the police investigation. The assistant chief constable Bobby Singleton told the BBC: "This criminal and violent behavior cannot be tolerated in a peaceful community and has to be condemned."

Local politicians said people were shocked by what happened.

The Alliance party assembly member (MLA) Sian Mulholland told a

local radio station there was no place for vigilantism in Northern Ireland in 2024.

"If people do have concerns, the police and the justice system are the routes we have to follow," she said, "otherwise we are in the wild west."

A local Traditional Unionist Voice MLA, Jim Allister, said: "It is for the lawful authorities to deal with law-breaking. Mob rule has no place in our society."

The last reported incident of a similar attack was more than 20 years ago.

In 2002 a 23-year-old man from west Belfast was found "crucified" and with broken legs in a loyalist area in the south of the city. Harry McCartan had to undergo surgery to remove wooden splinters that remained in his hands after the 6in nails were removed.