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Dominic Barton



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(Page 2 of 2)

Corporate espionage on the rise; Companies spy on employees & themselves

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TV Mahalingam, ET Bureau Jun 26, 2011, 06.34pm IST

Tags: Sunday ET | Pranab Mukherjee | north block | KPMG | India Inc | FM's office | Corporate espionage | Bugging

"We recently solved a case where a third party was sending critical data from one of our clients' offices," says Dinesh Pillai, CEO, Mahindra Special Services Group, a corporate security risk consulting firm and a part of Mahindra Group. Mahindra SSG advises over 100 corporate clients on securing their people, data and assets. "When you outsource something like systems maintenance, you have no idea who is that person who is sitting in the background with access to your networks. How many times has the person changed jobs? Why is a person whose work entails him to hang around till six o' clock in the evening hang around till nine every night? Companies just don't study the behavioural patterns of their employees," he adds.

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Tools of Trade

Pillai also says his company has often found hacking tools on desktops and servers of the clients he works with. "You don't have to know the science of hacking anymore. The net is full of step-by-step guides to hacking a network and tools which are free to download," says Pillai. If there is so much of espionage and subterfuge happening in Indian business, how is it that most people don't are not aware of it? "Things don't come out in the open because both parties don't want things to come out in the newspapers," says Pavan Duggal, a Supreme Court advocate specialising in digital law. "Once the respective managements find out, a negation process begins and a settlement takes place. Things don't get to the litigation stage," he adds. He also says that the increasing complexity of technology in corporate espionage is making detection difficult. He cites the example of the CFO of a large Indian company. "He was very fond of his communication device and had sent it for repair. The vendor installed software which recorded every call made and received and forwarded every email to another ID," says Duggal. "The problem is...how do you prove it?"

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