

Germany slams British action against Guardian

BERLIN, GERMANY: A German human rights official on Wednesday, 21 August, sharply criticised a British crackdown on the Guardian newspaper over its publication of US security secrets leaked by Edward Snowden.



Markus Loening, the rights chief at the foreign ministry, expressed "great concern" about media freedom in Britain after the Guardian said it was forced to destroy files linked to US surveillance practices or face a court battle.

He also slammed the detention and questioning at a London airport on Sunday, 18 August, of the partner of US journalist Glenn Greenwald, who has written extensively about Snowden's revelations for the Guardian.

"The United Kingdom has a long and proud tradition of freedom but the way the authorities detained David Miranda at Heathrow airport is unacceptable," he told the daily Berliner Zeitung.

"That took place on the basis of an anti-terror law but I cannot see any connection to terrorism. And the actions of the security services against the Guardian as described by editor-in-chief Alan Rusbridger deeply shocked me. The red line was crossed there."

David Miranda has been working with Greenwald and the Guardian on publishing material leaked by Snowden, the former US National Security Agency (NSA) worker who leaked the information.

Debate needed

Loening welcomed a "broad debate" in Britain about the authorities' actions and said his comments were intended as a "reminder of shared values among friends".

Asked about Loening's remarks, German Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman said he would not comment on the Guardian case.

"But I can say fundamentally again for the German government that press freedom and the protection of journalistic sources are crucial principles for us," Steffen Seibert told reporters.

He said Germany had recently passed legislation beefing up such protection, "so I think this scenario that is now being discussed in Britain is barely imaginable here," he said.

The NSA scandal has emerged as a major issue in the campaign ahead of German elections on 22 September.

Voters are particularly sensitive to state snooping because of the vivid memories of gross human rights violations by the Nazi and East German communist security services.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, who grew up in East Germany, has rejected claims by Snowden that US and British secret services run mass surveillance programmes on German citizens.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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