

Crime Surveillance and Our Right to Privacy...

Privacy is an important aspect of our life that we always seek for. The pictures that you sent to your family or the personal text that you sent to someone you trusted could potentially be seen by the government and some agencies in the name of a crime warrant. All the services associated with the internet are recorded and are used in the process of investigation under certain circumstances. So, does this hamper our right to privacy or is it fine if it's for security purposes. Monitoring one's personal life just because he/she can be a subject to future suspects of crime seems futile and directly against our right to privacy.

Crime and terrorism are the biggest fear of any country even Nepal. In the past we have been observing the execution of terror attacks and its effects. Whether it's the 9/11 attack, the Taj hotel attack or the Royal Massacre Nepal, the casualties are the innocent citizens and we see a great economic and political imbalance after the attacks. In order to prevent so in the coming future, the government and various agencies are constantly monitoring the suspects and any traces of crimes and terrorism in the country. In this process of investigation, the government and its associated agencies in hold the authority to monitor individual's online activity without even informing the so- called suspect, who can be any of us.

The Western trend of civil surveillance also spiked the Nepal Government in the recent years. With increasing criminal activities in the nation, the government has granted special authority and technologies to the Crime Investigation Department for online civil surveillance. So, what alters us Nepalese to this intrusion over our right to privacy, the controversial Media Council Bill and the Information Technology Bill proposed by the government in the past. According to the 2020 Nepal Crime and Safety Report, "The U.S. Department of State has assessed Kathmandu as being a MEDIUM-threat location for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests." So, the Government hasn't just ignored this fact and surely is in its way to make Kathmandu to LOW threat location through various online surveillance practice.

This is not fair at all, if the suspect is innocent his/her right to privacy is harshly violated. Despite all these disputes, it's very common to see the police department starting any criminal case by tracking one's online activities without any specific warrant just because they have the authority to do so and is regarded as the easy way to accomplish a case filed. This intrusion over our privacy is itself a criminal act. In the past few years, it was more than enough so several protests around the world and even in Nepal started calling for safeguarding personal freedom on the internet from the government fighting against terrorism human rights are to be respected, these unknown peeking on our privacy on the name of security should eventually stop and a new approach should be made for our security.

However there always arises a question, safety or privacy? A survey held in the UK in 2010 stated that the vast majority were on the side of safety and would let some violation of their privacy for their safety. People exclaimed that if it's for our safety and for a genuine reason they are ready to get observed. There is the argument of "Nothing to hide, nothing to fear", in support of mass surveillance. The online activity which is recorded should only be used for investigation purposes and only the data which has direct relation with the investigation should only be seen. The recorded data should also be kept private within the agency and should only be used during the time of investigation if very necessary.

According to the reports, many missions to eradicate crime and terrorism were successful in the past using this method of online surveillance. The mission to assassinate Osama Bin Laden also had online surveillance as a key step. Many terror attacks in South Asian region also are pre-suspected by online surveillance of individuals and necessary security is provided to prevent such attacks. Nepal located in the heart between the large terror affected countries, is commonly doubted as a region with terror insight.

Our safety is always important. So, the method of surveillance of an individual's online activity in the fight against crime and terrorism is not a completely wrong concept as its benefits are seen in the past. However, unwanted spying in the name of terrorism and crime, which might be a common thing in countries like Nepal in the coming future, should eventually come to an end. Even though one is found suspect, only the necessary observations should be made on his/her online activity by thorough confirmation. Personal life of a suspect or a criminal should never be made public respecting the right to privacy of each individual in the world.