

Indian government rejects Snowden's asylum request

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The Indian government on Tuesday flatly rejected a request for political asylum issued by former US National Security Agency contractor, Edward Snowden, and at the same time publicly defended the illegal US global surveillance operations exposed by the courageous whistleblower.

India is one of the 20 countries from which, Snowden, currently trapped in Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport, has sought asylum. The Congress Party-led government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh issued a curt public statement, declaring: "We have carefully examined the request [for asylum]. Following that examination we have concluded that we see no reason to accede to the request."

No explanation whatsoever has been provided to justify the decision, which underscores New Delhi's contempt for democratic rights both internationally and within India. The right to asylum is recognised in numerous human rights and international treaties. Snowden undeniably deserves sanctuary. For alerting the American and world populations to the crimes being carried out by Washington and its allies, Snowden is being persecuted by the Obama administration. He confronts a concerted slander campaign and bogus criminal charges that carry long prison terms or the death penalty if he is returned to the US. Yet for New Delhi, as for governments in Russia, Europe, and Latin America, the overriding consideration is to maintain warm relations with US imperialism.

The Indian government has increasingly aligned itself with Washington, particularly after signing an advantageous nuclear accord with the Bush administration in 2006. The US is seeking to enlist India as a strategic partner against Beijing, which is the

target of the Obama administration's aggressive military and diplomatic "pivot" to Asia. Washington has forged a strategic partnership with New Delhi, which regards China a regional rival.

Snowden exposed the fact that India is the fifth most heavily, NSA-monitored countries in the world. Through the PRISM program, which intercepted private data directly from computer and software companies including Microsoft, Apple, Facebook, and Yahoo, about 6.3 billion pieces of intelligence were gathered from Indian computer networks.

The government has dismissed widespread public outrage in India over the revelations. The *Hindustan Times* last month reported an unnamed intelligence official admitting that Indian agencies had known about the US spying operations for years. "While we did not know the name of the snoop operation (PRISM), we knew about NSA's snooping on India since 2005-06 and that our content was being read," he said.

This was kept secret from ordinary Indians, and New Delhi lodged no protests with Washington, concerned above all else not to jeopardise relations between the two countries.

Indian external affairs minister, Salman Khurshid, this week openly justified the NSA operations. "It is only computer analysis of patterns of calls and emails that are being sent," he declared, while in Brunei for an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meeting. "It is not actually snooping on specific content of anybody's message or conversation... Some of the information they [the US] got out of their scrutiny, they were able to use it to prevent serious terrorist attacks in several countries."

This is a pack of lies, which echo the Obama administration's attempt to falsify what has actually been exposed by Snowden while justifying the massive

electronic surveillance in the name of fighting “terror.” The purpose of the NSA espionage network is to monitor and suppress political dissent within the US and to bolster Washington’s strategic position against its rivals internationally.

The Indian government has rushed to defend the NSA, in part to justify its own domestic surveillance operation.

The Central Monitoring System (CMS) project, announced in 2011 and begun this year, gives intelligence agencies unchecked access to 900 million India’s landline and mobile telephone users and 120 million internet users. The CMS allows security agencies to monitor private online communications via Facebook, Twitter, Google, and other services. Nine government intelligence agencies, including the Intelligence Bureau, Central Bureau of Investigation, and the income tax department have access to the program.

India has no effective privacy laws. The government is using 1885 legislation from the British colonial era, which authorises the monitoring of private communication. As in the US, the bogus “war on terror” has provided the pretext, with cyber surveillance first stepped up by the Congress-led government in the aftermath of the 2008 September terrorist attack in Mumbai that killed 166 people.

In the wake of Snowden’s exposures, Cynthia Wong of Human Rights Watch denounced the CMS. “The Indian government’s centralised monitoring is chilling, given its reckless and irresponsible use of the sedition and Internet laws,” she said. “New surveillance capabilities have been used around the world to target critics, journalists, and human rights activists.”

The government yesterday attempted to deflect public anger in India generated by the external affairs minister’s support for the NSA’s spying. The foreign ministry feigned outrage over reports in the *Guardian* on the weekend that India was among 38 diplomatic missions in New York targeted for surveillance. Foreign ministry spokesman Syed Akbaruddin declared that India was “concerned” about monitoring diplomatic missions and would “raise with the US authorities these serious allegations.”

India’s rejection of asylum for Snowden is a warning to the working class that the Indian government is determined to maintain its strategic partnership with

Washington while intensifying its own police state preparations at home.



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