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# Belarus Brands Group Who Claimed to Hack Interior Ministry 'Extremist'

By AFP

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Alexander Lukashenko **Nikolai Petrov/BELTA/TASS**

A court in Belarus declared Wednesday a group of hackers who claim to have carried out a massive hack on the interior ministry in an attack on President Alexander Lukashenko's regime to be an "extremist" organisation.

The extremist designation effectively bans the so-called Kiber Partizany -- or Cyber Partisans -- and increases the criminal penalties that its members and supporters face if caught.

Last month the so-called Kiber Partizany -- or Cyber Partisans -- announced on Telegram that they had conducted "the largest cyberattack in the history of the Republic of Belarus" in what they called "Operation Heatwave."

Since then the group has published what it claims to be audio recordings of interior ministry officials ordering violence against anti-Lukashenko protesters on its Telegram channels

almost every day.

It has also published a map locating law enforcement officials that they claim took part in the crackdown, along with their personal data.

Since last August, Lukashenko has waged a wide-ranging crackdown after historic protests erupted against his nearly three-decade rule when he claimed victory in an election widely seen as rigged.

"The terrorist regime continues repressions; pogroms of civil society and independent media are taking place. Our response is a blow to the punitive system," the Cyber Partisans wrote on Telegram.

Most independent media in Belarus have been designated as extremist organizations, blocking their operations.

## - 'The operation continues' -

The interior ministry said Wednesday two of the Cyber Partisan's Telegram channels were also designated as extremist.

It said the social media accounts were "discrediting law enforcement officers and representatives of government bodies" and "inciting social enmity."

The designation of the channels as extremist means that republishing any material from them can result in a fine or arrest, said the interior ministry.

In emailed comments to AFP last week, the Cyber Partisans said they had already hacked more than 5 terabytes of data mainly from the interior ministry "but not only", saying that "the operation continues".

They also claimed to have taken offline cameras used by the interior ministry and the KGB security services.

"Operation Heatwave is part of a general plan to free the Belarusian people from tyranny," they said.

The interior ministry has not confirmed whether it was indeed hacked. The ministry, the Investigative Committee -- which probes major crimes in Belarus -- and the general prosecutor's office have not responded to AFP's repeated requests for comment.

Last year, when the Cyber Partisans published private information about interior ministry officials they claimed to have hacked, the ministry's spokeswoman Olga Chemodanova confirmed the leak.

After the group was branded as extremist on Wednesday, the hackers sent AFP on Telegram a trophy emoji.

"Undoubtedly this is a sign of the quality of our work," they wrote.

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