

Two naval officers may be sacked for data leak

New Delhi, January 28: Two of the four naval officers in the dock for allegedly divulging classified information and data on social networking and other websites are likely to be sacked from service.

The Navy HQ here is now examining the report of the Board of Inquiry (BoI), conducted at the Western Naval Command at Mumbai, against the four commander-rank officers (equivalent to Lt-Colonels in Army) from the naval technical branch.

The BoI has recommended stringent action against the four officers, including dismissal from service of two, for posting confidential information and data, including location of warships and their patrolling patterns, on sites like Facebook, as reported by TOI earlier.

"One of the officers, for instance, posted extensive details of his warship while still at sea. But, as yet, no espionage angle has come to light in the case," a source said. The "punishments" recommended by the BoI against the four officers have to be "approved" by higher authorities. Dismissal from service, for instance, has to be approved at the level of the defence ministry.

The armed forces have been regularly issuing directives to their personnel to strictly refrain from putting sensitive information and service-related matters, like location of units or deployment patterns, on social networking sites.

The Army, for instance, in October last year had directed all its officers and personnel to even remove their pictures and information showing their affiliation to the service from their personal profiles on social networking sites.

Instructions are also in place to be extremely careful in the use of computer and digital storage devices after intelligence alerts pointed to an increase in leakage of classified data from defence establishments through the use of pen drives, removable hard disks, CDs, VCDs and the like.

Chinese and Pakistani online espionage agents have also been hacking into Indian computer systems over the last several years. For instance, an Army major's personal computer, on which he had stored around 2,000 classified and sensitive documents, was hacked from Pakistan just last year.

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