

Biden and tech bosses talk cybersecurity after ransomware attacks

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Apple CEO Tim Cook attends a meeting with US President Joe Biden on how to improve cybersecurity.

President Joe Biden gathered Wednesday with business and government leaders to discuss improving cybersecurity following high-profile attacks

that raised questions about the vulnerability of so-called critical infrastructure.

Biden and key cabinet officials hosted chief executives of Apple, Google, Amazon and Microsoft, along with leaders from the finance and utilities sectors.

The gathering comes after hacks and data breaches that have targeted a major US oil pipeline, a meatpacking company and the Microsoft Exchange email system, as well as ransomware attacks hitting various sectors.

"I've invited you all here today because you have the power and the capacity and responsibility, I believe, to raise the bar on cybersecurity," Biden said.

After the talks, major tech companies, including three global leaders in cloud computing, announced training programs and investments in cybersecurity.

Microsoft, for example, plans to inject \$20 billion into its cybersecurity efforts over five years, as well as "\$150 million to help US government agencies upgrade protections", according to a tweet from CEO Satya Nadella.

Amazon promised in a statement to make its security training for employees available to the general public, and Google said it will invest \$10 billion over five years to help "secure the software supply chain".

The latest attacks, which affected Microsoft email servers and the widely deployed SolarWinds security software, raise questions about protecting 16 "critical infrastructure" sectors including energy, utilities, defense, food and manufacturing.

Some analysts have called for tougher sanctions against Russia and other countries accused of harboring cybercriminals. Others have suggested more scrutiny of cryptocurrency, which is used by hackers to collect ransomware.

A senior administration official told journalists the meeting would focus on "concrete" measures to improve security.

The recent attacks have "created a sense of urgency" and the need to refocus the attention of government and the private sector, the official added.

"We want to focus on the root causes of any malicious (cyber)activity," the official said.

This means ensuring more robust systems of computer software and hardware in both government and industry.

"We need to transition to a system where security is there by default," the official said.

Attending the session were CEOs Sundar Pichai of Google, Andy Jassy of Amazon, Tim Cook of Apple and Nadella of Microsoft.

The meeting also included top executives of JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America and other finance and insurance companies, as well as the heads of water and energy companies and educational organizations.

Government leaders included Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and top cybersecurity advisers.

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