

Judge curbs Uber engineer in trade secrets case

SAN FRANCISCO, USA: A judge has ordered an Uber engineer at the center of a self-driving car trade secrets suit sidelined and files taken from Alphabet-owned Waymo returned.



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A partial injunction issued by US District Court Judge William Alsup, the text of which was released Monday, fell short of the complete shut-down of Uber's self-driving car efforts that Alphabet lawyers had requested.

The case stems from the lawsuit filed in February by Waymo, formerly known as the Google self-driving car unit, which claimed a former manager Anthony Levandowski took a trove of technical data with him when he left to launch a competing venture that went on to become Otto and was later acquired by Uber.

"Waymo has supplied a compelling record that Levandowski pilfered over 14,000 files from Waymo, and that Uber knew or should have known as much when it brought him on board," Alsup said in his order.

The judge ordered Uber to do everything in its power to prevent information taken from Waymo from being used at the on-demand ride company and to return all copies to Waymo, or the court, by the end of this month.

Under the order, Levandowski is barred from being involved at Uber with anything to do with LiDAR, sight-based object-sensing technology used to help self-driving cars "see," at issue in the suit.

Alsup last week referred the case to the Justice Department "for investigation of possible theft of trade secrets."

Alsup said he made the recommendation "based on the evidentiary record," but "takes no position on whether a prosecution is warranted."

Waymo argued in the lawsuit that a "calculated theft" of its technology netted Otto a buyout of more than \$500 million and enabled Uber to revive a stalled self-driving car program.

California-based ride-sharing service Uber acquired commercial transport-focused tech startup Otto late last year as the company pressed ahead with its pursuit of self-driving technology.

Levandowski, a co-founder of 90-person startup Otto, was put in charge of Uber's efforts to develop self-driving technology for personal driving, delivery and trucking.

Waymo's lawsuit contends that Levandowski in December 2015 downloaded more than 14,000 proprietary files from a highly confidential design server to a laptop and took the data with him to the startup.

Source: AFP

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