



Ethical hackers help police to tackle crimes

Mouparna Bandyopadhyay Posted: Dec 23, 2008 at 0238 hrs

kolkata Less than a year has passed since Prateek Agarwal, a certified IT security professional, came to Kolkata from New York where he had a successful career in consultancy. He set up an IT training institute specialising in cyber security and where students were trained in ethical hacking, too.

Now, the institute has turned out to be a sought after destination by the Kolkata police to crack cyber crimes and threat mails. With each terror attack preceded by threat emails, security officers are giving a fresh impetus on checking cyber terrorism.

"If recent trends in terrorism are any indication, cyber security will play a very important role in checking terror activities," said a senior officer of Kolkata police.

Agarwal says he sensed opportunity in the area after he found a lot of "inefficiency" in cyber security in the country. So far, he has given several suggestions to police, state IT department and other government agencies on cyber crime.

"There are around 15 cyber security experts in the city who have been helping the Kolkata police on different occasions. Most of them work as independent consultants," he adds.

Agarwal's school, which started functioning in March 2008, has churned out 100 professionals till date. Most of them being college-goers between the age group of 18 to 25. "Nearly 90 per cent of the students aspire to be hackers. We have a rigorous process of selection and of the 100-odd professionals, only about 10 students have been able to complete the advanced levels that include hacking and defending websites," says Agarwal.

The school has also introduced a crash course of 48 hours on ethical hacking for engineers. "Computers have been my passion and hence I joined the advanced course at the school," says 18-year-old Akshat Ajitsaria, an undergraduate student.

Most experts feel that Kolkata, as a city, is vulnerable to cyber security threats. The state has 2,46,896 broadband users and a far higher number of dial-up users. "The Kolkata police and all government offices rely on firewalls and antivirus softwares. That is not enough. A simple Trojan sent by an miscreant can crash the entire IT system of the police in minutes," says a cyber security expert.

Vinny Mehta, Executive Director, Manufacturers' Association of IT (MAIT), adds: "Everyone from individuals to government offices is vulnerable to security threats today and protecting your IP address has become crucial."

Cyber security experts feel that it is time that Kolkata police trained its personnel to combat cyber threats. "Till now the police has not formally tied up with us. We are there to assist them whenever there is a need," says an expert. Police, however, has no plans to train their personnel in this field. "We have no cyber security expert in Kolkata police. Whenever need arises we take help of experts from outside who give us technical support. Training our personnel to be cyber security experts is not yet on the cards," says DC DD Jawed Shamim.

In recent times, all terror attacks have been preceded by threat Emails. "Trained personnel can take anything between 15 mins to 2 hours to pinpoint a location from which an email has been sent," says Agarwal. He goes on to explain that primarily Email origins are traced by viewing the header of the Email. From there the IP address is traced and then the experts take the help of Internet service providers (ISP) to trace the mail. "Kolkata police alone receives about 30 complaints of cyber crime in a month," says an official of the cyber crime cell.

School for hackers

- * Started in March 2008
- * 100 cyber security experts have passed out from the school
- * About 10 of them received advanced training, including ethical hacking
- * Most students are college goers between 18-25 years

How cyber security experts help police

- * By tracing threat mails and hoax emails
- * By scrutinising personal computers and laptops of the accused
- * By providing technical support to police in securing their confidential data

How to keep your computer safe from being compromised

- * Have a strong password
- * Never share your password
- * Be very cautious while opening forwards even from known addresses
- * Avoid downloading free stuff from the internet
- * Be careful while downloading free applications
- * Secure your wireless connections as they are more vulnerable

30 Number of complaints of cyber crimes received by Kolkata police per month (approx)