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Hackers playing havoc with e-mail accounts

Thursday, 02 August 2007 | <http://www.nerve.in/news:25350078335> (<http://www.nerve.in/news:25350078335>) | channel: India (<http://www.nerve.in/channel:india>) (<http://www.nerve.in/channel:>)

"It is not very hard to track the hacker or cyber criminal. The technology is so advanced, which can catch them in hours, but our police remains to be seven times behind those criminals,' Duggal said. "

By **Sahil Makkar and Prashant K. Nanda** (<http://www.nerve.in/author:Sahil+Makkar+and+Prashant+K.+Nanda>)

New Delhi, Aug 1 - Mahendra Ved, a senior journalist here, was stunned after receiving a call from his Bahrain-based daughter a few days ago, sounding distressed and enquiring after his whereabouts and well-being.

'She was crying and desperately wanted to reach me after reading an e-mail, which was sent to her by someone who had hacked my gmail account and forwarded a troubling message to all my friends and relatives,' Ved says.

'Since Sunday, I have received at least 60 such calls,' adds Ved.

The e-mail sent out by the hacker sought money to get Ved out of a hotel in Nigeria where, according to the e-mail, he was stuck after losing all his 'money, valuables, passport and other valuables'.

The lengthy e-mail ended with a request for \$3,600 so that he can 'settle embassy issues, pay hotel bill, and get a ticket back to India'.

Ved is not the only victim of this outrageous scam.

More and more professionals, students and businessmen are going through having to answer distress calls from close relatives and friends as their personal e-mail accounts are being increasingly hacked into.

The trouble begins after family members open an e-mail message that informs them that their dear ones are 'stranded' in an African nation without money or food.

In June, a professor at the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) had to go through a similar ordeal.

Amita Singh, head of the university's law and governance department, realised that her account had been hacked into after receiving a flurry of calls from friends and relatives.

The hacker had sent mails to everyone on her Yahoo address book seeking money to get her out of a hotel in Nigeria where, just like Ved, she was 'stuck after losing all her money, valuables and passport'.

'I was flooded with phone calls from all across the world and every one was asking me just one question - how and where can we send the money to get you out of trouble?' Amita Singh told IANS.

'I was so tense after the incident that I personally rang up all the friends and relatives to inform them about my well-being. I have also come across five such people who had suffered the same trauma in recent past,' she said.

But when she went to file a complaint, she found to her horror that the police officers were ignorant of how to progress in the case, as they had no expertise in cyber-crime.

Amita Singh said: 'I was shocked to hear from some policemen that Delhi Police are not equipped to handle such cases and that they had never till date handled a case like this.'

'Hacking e-mails and sending scary messages to family members and friends have become a norm in India and the cops are struggling to battle it out,' admitted a senior police official.

Police personnel have little training to tackle such crimes and hence many such cases also go unreported.

However, noted cyber crime lawyer Pavan Duggal said tracking a hacker or cyber criminal is not difficult, as technology has advanced.

'It is not very hard to track the hacker or cyber criminal. The technology is so advanced, which can catch them in hours, but our police remains to be seven times behind those criminals,' Duggal said.

Despite repeated inquiries, Roli Aggarwal, corporate communications head of Google India, refused to comment on the growing cases of hacking of personal e-mail accounts.

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