Cyber Security and Cyber Crime in a Digital Society

With the increasing use of Internet and its availability for all, the cyber space is expanding making it easier for hackers and cyber criminals to target organizations and individuals to demand ransom. In case the target denies the criminals’ demand, they attack infrastructure and services to stall the entire system. The increased prevalence and severity of cyber-attacks poses a serious threat to a country’s economy and to the society at large.

For the past few years, cyber-crimes in Pakistan have been exponentially increasing. In the recent years, thousands of cyber-attack incidents have been reported in media wherein the attackers, in many cases, used ransomware to extract money from the victims. The attackers can, at will, disable financial, electric grid and transport systems. In the year 2017 alone, there were reportedly 1,290 inquiries made and 160 arrests in connection with cyber-crimes. Very recently, Pakistan’s Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) reported 29,577 cyber-crime cases in two-and-a-half years.

Cyber-crime comes in a variety of forms, i.e. denial of service, attacks on websites, thefts, blackmailing, extortion, manipulation and destruction. The tools are many and varied, which include malware, ransom ware, spyware, social engineering, and even alteration in physical devices such as household appliances. The targets have been even cars and medical services.

Although Pakistan is cognizant of the prevailing threats to its security, we have not been able to enact responsive laws to combat cyber-crime so far. Even the agencies responsible for coordinating the cyber-security mechanism in the country have half-heartedly been coming to grips to enforce cyber security measures and enact laws to combat the increasing cases.

This panel of experts aims to take stock of the current situation pertaining to cyber security and cyber-crime in Pakistan and the region. It would also recommend how to enhance cyber security through well-designed mechanisms to protect our communication systems from unauthorized use or modification or exploitation by the hackers and cyber criminals.

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