

The security issue

A conference on hacking and security brought together big names and smart ideas in Lahore



You would not be wrong in thinking that security is the next buzz in the local IT market that stretches far beyond stealing your webmail password. It could be anything from a controlled and speculated stock trading to taking over a live transmission of a cable operator. To discuss related issues, there are many prestigious knowledge-sharing events staged throughout the world. Defcon, BlackHat, HITBSec and SiScan are the most recognised events where you can meet the geeks and goons, all dressed up in a messy outfit, celebrating hexadecimal thoughts and bragging about the weaknesses that they have discovered. The audience for such events includes three-letter agencies, software and hardware vendors, researchers and investigators as well as people from academia and government officials.

A similar effort was put together in Lahore to bring forth the local geeks and researchers. The Conference on Hacking and Security (CHASE), a security conference, was inspired by Defcon and the politically famous BlackHat, but it had its own distinct character and feel. CHASE has not only been able to attract the attention of the local academic world, government personnel, media and the press but it has also been successful in developing a local security community, particularly in terms of post-conference dialogues and talks.

Although there were no zero-day exploits presented or any political statements made at CHASE, it still managed to glue the audience to their seats due to its content



Ammar Jaffrey delivering the keynote address

and follow-up arguments. The conference keynote address was delivered by Ammar Jaffrey who is serving as a Project Director at the National Emergency Response Center for Cyber Crimes (NR3C). Ammar is well-known internationally due to his work and has been serving in several government departments including the Intelligence Bureau and the FIA. Ammar, in his talk, gave an insight into the current state of information security in Pakistan and emphasised the trend of technology and the internet changing the world. He provided the

examples of nouns being changed into verbs (users 'Google' things instead of search) it to point out the extent of influence technology has on our everyday lives.

Ammar brought to light the most talked about Denial of Service (DoS) attacks against Pakistani websites and how NR3C circumvented the attackers as well as a government perspective of information security and details into how NR3C operates.

Muhammad Farooq-i-Azam, the main organiser for the event as well as being of a sound technical background, followed up the keynote address with a talk on networks. He has been toying with hardware for a very long time and designed his own Intel

Suranga de Silva who is currently employed as an Information Security Specialist.

Suranga is also the founder of Ceylon Linux and he presented his ideas of hardening a Linux operating system at lower level. Many Linux enthusiasts present in the audience acknowledged these ideas as he talked about basic policy controls like password aging, reviewing boot processes and patch management to hardcore alchemy of memory protection, compiling SE Linux and file system integrity as well.

Further discussions in the conference included advocating the use of open source applications, pointing out weaknesses of VoIP signalling protocols, the operations of 'Snort' as an open source Intrusion

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8086/8088 based single board computer while tweaking around several UNIX based systems. He is also an active contributor of IPGRAB project, a well known packet dissector and sniffer bundled with Debian Linux. In his address, Farooq talked about the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of a switched network and explained how easily a switched network can be compromised to glean important information. He explained the anatomy of an Address Resolution Protocol (ARP) request and reply, clarified the mechanics of attack and demonstrated the use of different tools including one to poison a host and sniffing the information to carry out a successful attack. He also talked about the development of packet sniffers using the well-known and ubiquitous libpcap (Linux) and Berkeley Packet Filter.

There was also a talk delivered by

Detection System (IDS) and the marvels of computer forensics.

Events such as CHASE have not only revived the true essence of hacking and security but also have helped developing a community for its discussions. CHASE Pakistan has future plans of hosting the conference internationally and inviting some of the renowned security experts and hackers. Such events will definitely be highly appreciated by all forms of modern media, simply due to its academic, social and financial significance. 🐝

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IPGRAB project sourceforge.net/projects/ipgrab
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The Sites