

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

Subject: Communication Security Advisory for Government Officials

The undersigned is directed to mention that a large number of Government Officers/Officials are using public domain messaging platforms like Whatsapp, Telegram, etc. for classified official communication. Officers usually take photograph/scan copies of various classified documents and send the same through the messaging platforms. Such practice is a clear violation of information security instructions as provided in Manual of Departmental Security Instructions (MoDSI) and National Information Security Policy Guidelines (NISPG).

2. Classified information shared on public domain messaging platforms like Whatsapp can be harvested by private companies owning the platform as they control storage servers that are often located outside the country. This information can be used by adversaries or can be monetized for gains. In order to curtail the leakage of classified information and misuse of such platforms, the following guidelines are reiterated in the interest of the communication security:

2.1. Classified information falls under the following four categories, namely, TOP SECRET, SECRET, CONFIDENTIAL and RESTRICTED. The Top Secret and Secret documents shall not be shared over the internet. According to NISPG, the Top Secret and Secret information shall be shared only in a closed network with leased line connectivity where SAG grade encryption mechanism is deployed. However, Confidential and Restricted information can be shared on internet through networks that have deployed commercial AES 256-bit encryption.

2.2. Pertinently, the use of Government Email (NIC email) facility or Government Instant Messaging Platforms (such as CDAC's Samvad, NIC's Sandesh, etc.) is recommended in the Ministry/Departments for the communication of Confidential and Restricted information. However, utmost care should be taken during the classification of information and before the communication of the same over internet (i.e. an information which may deserve a Top Secret/Secret classification shall not be downgraded to Confidential/Restricted for the purpose of sharing the information over the internet)

2.3. In the context of e-Office System, it may be advised that the Ministry/Department may deploy proper firewalls and white-listing of IP addresses. The

'e-Office server may be accessed through a Virtual Private Network (VPN) for enhanced security. The Ministry/Department may ensure that only authorized employees are allowed access to the e-Office System. However, Top Secret/Secret information shall be shared over the e-Office system only with leased line closed network and SAG grade encryption mechanism.

2.4 In the context of Video Conferencing (VC) for official purpose, Government VC solutions offered by CDAC, CDOT and NIC may be used. The meeting ID and password shall be shared only with authorized participants. To ensure better security, the 'Waiting Room' facility and prior registration of the participants may be used. Even then, Top Secret and Secret information shall not be shared during the VC.

2.5. Officials working from home, may use security-hardened electronic devices (such as Laptops, Desktops, etc.). Such devices may be connected to the office servers through a VPN and Firewall setup. It is pertinent to mention that Top Secret/Secret information shall not be shared in the 'work from home' environment.

2.6. Digital Assistant devices like Amazon's Echo, Apple's HomePod, Google Home, etc. may not be kept in office. Further, Digital Assistants (such as Alexa, Siri, etc.) should be turned off in the smart phones/watches used by the employee. Smart phones may be deposited outside the meeting room during discussion on classified issues.

3. In the light of the above, all Officers/Officials of the Ministry and its attached offices are requested to ensure communication security as per the aforementioned points.

4. This issues with the approval of Secretary, MSDE


(Arpit Srivastava)
Assistant Director

To,

1. AS, MSDE
2. DG(DGT)
3. SEA, MSDE
4. JS(AV)
5. Chairperson, NCVET
6. CEO, NSDC

Copy to: 1. PPS to Secretary, SDE