

International

'Love Bug' bites computers worldwide

WASHINGTON, May 5: The "Love Bug" computer virus which spreads through e-mail has affected more than three million computer files worldwide, Trend Micro, an Internet security firm, reported today, says AFP.

The virus, which emerged Thursday as an "ILOVEYOU" e-mail greeting, reportedly started in Manila, quickly rippling across Asia, Europe and North and South America.

Analysts believe it caused the most damage in the United States, where more than 2.5 million computer files were affected by 1530 BST according to Trend Micro, a leader anti-virus software provider.

The US Federal Bureau of Investigation launched a probe to determine the origin of the virus, the agency's National Infrastructure Protection Center said Thursday in a statement.

The NIPC said that by late Thursday "new variants of this worm have been discovered."

Trend Micro estimated early Friday that 3.08 million computer files were infected worldwide by the "ILOVEYOU" virus.

Outside the United States,

Europe had some 321,000 computer files infected, Asia 127,000, South America 55,000, Australia 25,000 and Africa 17,500.

The virus is "spreading much more rapidly" than previous destructive viruses, said Sandi Morgenthaler, a spokeswoman for Trend Micro, speaking from the Japanese firm's North American headquarters in Cupertino, California.

The virus is unleashed when the reader opens an e-mail attachment promising a "LOVE-LETTER-FOR-YOU." It then spreads through the address book of each victim.

Embedded in the message are the words "Manila, Philippines," giving rise to suspicions it originated in the Philippines, and the phrase "I hate go to school."

Analysts Thursday were already trying to count the cost of "LOVE."

Peter Tippett, a scientist with ICSA.net, a firm in Reston, Virginia, which tracks the cost of damage done by viruses said "ICSA.net anticipates damages exceeding one billion dollars

before this problem is over."

The hidden program is known as a "worm" virus, because it replicates and then sends itself to all the e-mail addresses listed in the user's Microsoft Outlook address book.

It also infects video, picture and sound files as well as crucial operating system files in a snowballing effect, experts said, comparing it to the "Chernobyl" and "Melissa" viruses, which paralyzed millions of e-mail servers last year.

The NIPC said that "variants of this worm are believed to use subject lines of joke and 'Sustikim shi vakra kavos puodukui,'" the NIPC said.

These variants may behave differently than the original worm and impact different files, it added.

Various companies are offering information on how to get rid of the virus on their websites.

The computer networks at the US Congress and British and Danish parliaments and hundreds of American, German, French, Spanish and Swiss companies have fallen victim.

It also hit banks, brokerages and financial institutions and some media outlets across Asia and Australia.

In the United States, the "ILOVEYOU" virus was first detected by a US federal computer virus monitoring unit at 5:18 a.m. (1518 BST) Thursday.

In Washington, the White House, Pentagon, State Department and Congress were all hit by the e-mail attack, which can destroy or overwrite 15 different types of files.

White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said Thursday that "operations at the White House were not materially affected." He added that computer security people responded quickly this morning.

The virus forced the Pentagon to shut down some of its computer systems. Ken Bacon, defense department spokesman, said the agency had been hit with an onslaught of the messages.

Pentagon personnel had been urged "to avoid any contact, intimate or otherwise, with the love bug virus," he told reporters, to laughter, at a regular briefing.

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The "ILOVEYOU" computer virus cyber greeting as it appeared as an e-mail message on a computer in Hong Kong yesterday. The virus, which reportedly originated in Manila and quickly rippled across Asia, Europe and North and South America, has affected more than one million computer files worldwide and is estimated to have caused in excess of 100 million dollars in damage.

— AFP photo

Lockerbie trial enters 3rd day

CAMP ZEIST, Netherlands, May 5: Police who investigated the Lockerbie bombing recalled today their initial suspicions that a militant Palestinian group might have carried out the mid-air attack, reports AFP.

In testimony on the third day of the trial of two Libyans, a former police chief said he had sought information on the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command (PFLP-GC).

Gordon Ferrie, a detective chief inspector at the time of the December 21, 1988 bombing over Lockerbie, southwest Scotland, also recalled the devastation around the crash site.

Some of the passengers of doomed Pan Am Flight 103 were still strapped to their seats.

All 259 passengers and crew of the Boeing 747 died when a bomb exploded in the hold, sending blazing wreckage raining down over Lockerbie and killing a further 11 people on the ground.

Abdel-Basset Ali al-Megrahi, 48, and Al-Amin Khalifa Fahima, 44, deny the key charges of murder and conspiracy to murder.

The prosecution alleges they were Libyan secret agents who sent the bomb, packed in a suitcase, from Malta to Frankfurt and from there to London Heathrow airport and the New York-bound flight.

Defence lawyers have indicated they intend to incriminate two Palestinian groups, a tactic aimed at casting enough doubt to secure an acquittal for the Libyans from the three Scottish judges trying the case.

Both groups -- the PFLP-GC and the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front -- Thursday denied any responsibility.

Indian Railways suffered 444 accidents in '99

NEW DELHI, May 5: India's state-run railways suffered 444 accidents last year, junior railways minister Digvijay Singh told parliament here today, reports AFP.

Singh also said there were a total of 24,049 unmanned level crossings in the country out of which 3,205 were located in northern and eastern India.

India's antiquated railway network, one of the world's largest, carries 13 million people between 7,000 stations every day.

India has had three major rail disasters in the past four years which have left at least 800 dead and more than 2,000 maimed.

Albright warns Iran against treatment of Jews

WASHINGTON, May 5: Secretary of State Madeleine Albright warned Iran on Thursday that the outcome of its trial of 13 Jews on spy charges could have international repercussions, reports AP.

Albright, who has led US calls for a new dialogue with Tehran, said in a strong statement before the trials of the 13 Jews on spy charges could have international repercussions, rights.

The 13 Jews face death sentences on charges of spying for Israel. Three have confessed, but the State Department has questioned whether the trial conforms with worldwide standards of due process.

Governments from around the world are right in telling officials in Iran that what happens in the trials of the 13 Jews will have repercussions everywhere," Albright said.

Albright's overtures, which have included criticism of Iran's human rights record, have failed to stir the government in Tehran to accept the offer for dialogue.

In her speech, Albright assailed anti-Semitism as "a recurring curse." She said from the former Soviet Union to the Middle East, from California to Central Europe, anti-Semitism persists.

"This demands vigilance from all who love freedom," she said.



Israeli policemen check a crater caused by the Hezbollah Katyusha rocket attack on the northern Israeli town of Kyriat Shmona early yesterday. A similar attack the night before killed an Israeli soldier and wounded 27 people in the same town. Israel retaliated by air raids on power stations near Beirut and Tripoli as well as Hezbollah and Syrian targets

— AFP photo

Israeli warplanes bomb Lebanon targets

BEIRUT, May 5: Israeli jets raided Lebanon today, striking at two power stations, a guerrilla arms depot and blowing a crater in the main highway between Beirut and Damascus, witnesses and security sources said, reports Reuters.

One civilian was wounded and a power station on the outskirts of Beirut was a "ball of fire," they said.

Israel confirmed its planes had fired on targets in Lebanon in retaliation for a rocket attack by Syrian-backed Hezbollah guerrillas on northern Israel on Thursday. Dozens of Katyusha rockets were launched across the border, killing a soldier.

The Israeli Defence Forces will continue to take all necessary action against Hezbollah and those backing it in order to defend the northern border," a military statement said.

Hezbollah had said its offensive -- the heaviest barrage in nearly a year -- was in reprisal for a rocket fired from the direction of Israel's occupation zone in southern Lebanon.

Earlier, warplanes had attacked the power station of Bsalim on the outskirts of Beirut and another station in Dier Amar, near the northern Palestinian refugee camp of Beddawi.

"Bsalim station is a ball of fire. They raided it at least twice," one witness said.

Israeli planes also flew

above Beirut where they broke the sound barrier. In the south, they raided the outskirts of Khirbet Shlem, a village facing the western sector of the Israeli occupied zone.

The raids on Lebanon's infrastructure are the second this year. In February Israel destroyed three power stations, prompting strong Arab condemnation.

The attacks took place hours before UN envoy Terje Roed-Larsen was to hold a third meeting with President Emile Lahoud and Prime Minister Selim Al-Hoss to discuss Israel's planned withdrawal from Lebanon by July.

The United Nations and Lebanon apparently disagreed when envoy Roed Larsen met officials on Thursday.

Lebanon said Syrian-backed guerrillas had the right to keep fighting Israel if it did not hand over all territory claimed by Lebanon -- which is less than required under a UN resolution.

Israel has vowed to retaliate for any cross-border attacks.



The estranged brother of Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, Anura Bandaranaike, pushes police barricades yesterday to stage a demonstration in Colombo protesting draconian public security laws that has banned public demonstrations and strikes.

— AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Voting begins in Iran:

Polling stations opened in Iran on Friday for the second round of parliamentary elections with 66 places at stake in the 290-seat chamber, Reuters reports from Tehran.

In February's first round, reformers close to President Mohammad Khatami won over 100 seats but annulments and wrangling over the count in Tehran have cast a pall over the vote. More than 11,000 polling stations have been set up in 52 constituencies for Friday's runoff, state television quoted the interior ministry official in charge of the elections as saying.

Dozens more have been injured and are being treated in hospital after fighting broke out in the early hours of Thursday between residents of the towns of Ile and Modakeke, according to the reports in the Punch and Nigerian Tribune. The feud between the two towns -- both dominated by the ethnic Yoruba group -- revolves around local politics and land ownership rights.