



## Operation P-HUNT 23.3

*"We are seeing just the tip of a growing iceberg in terms of online child exploitation material."* - Mr. Jürgen Stock, INTERPOL Secretary General.

Kerala Police CCSE (Countering Child Sexual Exploitation) Team, functioning under Cyberdome, understanding the gravity of the problem, has for the last three years, embarked on a sustained digital analysis of the virtual trends and these problems, particularly during the Pandemic period and after identifying the culprits a special operation titled P-hunt was launched, which has been highly successful and over the last couple of years more than 1120 cases have been registered and more than 494 accused have been arrested for possession of CSAM.

The current basic trends that can be derived in the behavior of internet users, in Kerala, is that there has been a lot of deterrent effect due to the hyper active work of the CCSE cell and due to the arrests and registration of cases. But in many cases these crimes are related to mental addictions that require treatment, and in the absence of the same, there are trends of repetition of offences or the accused coming back to the crime, more prepared, with better tools of anonymity etc. So after every two months we again see the trend going up and a spike in such cases against children.

A familiar trend is found in porn groups operating over WhatsApp and Telegram and number of such groups have increased drastically during this period. Due to the police action through P Hunt drives, the accused now views the video and delete it using specialized software to evade detection. They also have started formatting their phone every three days. Use of

malwares to activate the webcams of the victim and to steal information of children has also been reported in certain cases.

Understanding the gravity of the problem and the fact that children are being continued to be exploited, the CCSE cell of Kerala Police went into a high-tech mode, to identify the persons downloading/uploading CSAM material from the internet. IP address were collected using specialized software and persons sharing such pictures on social media handles were traced using different tools. Apart from this the Tipline reports received from NCMEC (Through NCRB) were also analyzed and identified.

Last time during the month of April 2023 in the covert operation named **P-HUNT\_ 23.2** raids were organized with a special emphasis on nabbing migrant workers in Kerala involved in CSAM sharing. In the drive around **62** such locations were identified throughout the State. 34 devices were seized and 18 cases registered.

This time on Sunday the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2023 early morning, the covert operation named **P-HUNT\_ 23.3** was conducted mainly aiming CSAM sellers in Kerala. Around **449** suspect locations were identified throughout the State. The information was then collated and passed on to 449 teams under the **District Police Chiefs**, having members of cyber cells, technical experts and women component.

The raids were highly successful and as a part of the operation, the teams were able to seize **212 devices and register 133 cases, u/s 67 B of IT Act** - which include Mobile phones, Modems, Hard Disks, Memory Cards, Laptops, Computers etc. with graphic and illegal videos and pictures of children. The distressing part of the same is that many of the videos/pictures appear to be of local children, ranging in age group of 5 years to 16 years.

Based on the recovery of the devices with the CSAM material, **8 arrests** were made and which includes youth working in good professional jobs and most of them are IT savvy, which is the reason why they were using all kinds of encrypted handles to upload and download the material. Some are suspected to be involved in the trafficking of children also, as there are many chats to this effect in their devices.

The details of rest of the people involved in circulating these images and videos are being further collected. Strong action will be taken against all the individuals involved in this racket, continuing our policy of zero tolerance in these matters. The technical assistance for the collection of information was led by CCSE Squad.



The State Police Chief had constituted the "CCSE (Counter Child Sexual Exploitation) Unit for Kerala Police" with special emphasis on preventing online Child exploitation and child pornography on the net. This Unit has become fully functional from January 2020 onwards and works full time on preventing and detecting online crimes against children. The Team works in close contact with the "INTERPOL-Crimes against Children Unit and the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC). We are also tied up with International Organizations like" **Project VIC, Avia Tor, BBA and Bodhini** etc. and a host of local organizations with a common objective of Protecting children from abuse.

It should be noted that as per the current law, viewing, distributing or storing of any child pornographic content is a criminal offense can result in, up to 5 years imprisonment and up to Rs 10 lakh fine. Kerala Police seeks the support of the community, in this project and if any member of the public

comes across any such channels or groups that spread child sex-related content, we urge you to please inform Hi-Tech Crime Enquiry Cell, Cyberdome or Cyber cells at the earliest, considering "Child security as the responsibility of every member of the society".

P Prakash IPS  
Inspector General of Police  
Intelligence & Nodal Officer, Cyberdome

