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Some remarks on the Pethő public key cryptosystem

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In [1] Pethő introduced a public key cryptosystem. In its definition (see below for more details) an essential role is played by a monic polynomial $g(t)$ of degree n and a modulus M , which belong to the nonpublic part of this cryptosystem. The aim of this note is to show that if the greatest common divisor of the n th power of the constant term of g and M is too “small”, then the cryptosystem can be broken in polynomial time. The crucial role in our cryptanalysis is played by a system of congruences (9) whose solution can be found under the above mentioned condition.

1 Pethő public key cryptosystem

For the convenience of the reader, we describe in this section the main ingredients of the public key cryptosystem suggested by A. Pethő in [1].

Let $g(t) = t^n + g_{n-1}t^{n-1} + \dots + g_1t + g_0 \in \mathcal{Z}[t]$, where $\mathcal{Z}$ denotes the ring of integers and $\mathbf{G}$ the companion matrix of the polynomial $g(t)$. Further, let $\mathbf{x}_i \in \mathcal{Z}^n$ for $i \geq 0$ be the sequence of vectors defined by

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbf{x}_0 &= (1, 0, \dots, 0) \\ \mathbf{x}_{i+1} &= \mathbf{x}_i \mathbf{G} \text{ for } i \geq 0.\end{aligned}\tag{1}$$

Given a finite subset $\mathcal{N}$ of $\mathcal{Z}$, $\mathcal{A}_{\mathcal{N}}$ will denote the set of all finite words over $\mathcal{N}$ satisfying the property that if $0 \in \mathcal{N}$ and $l > 0$ then $w_l \neq 0$. If $l(w) = l + 1$ denotes the length of the word $w = w_0w_1 \dots w_l$, then $\mathcal{A}_{\mathcal{N}}^L$ will denote the set of all words of $\mathcal{A}_{\mathcal{N}}$ of length not exceeding $L + 1$.

DEFINITION 1.1 *A pair $\{g(t), \mathcal{N}\}$ is called a weak number system if the map $T : \mathcal{A}_{\mathcal{N}} \rightarrow \mathcal{Z}^n$ defined by*

$$T(w_0 \dots w_l) = w_0 \mathbf{x}_0 + \dots + w_l \mathbf{x}_l\tag{2}$$

is injective.

S. M. F.

One sufficient condition for weak number systems is contained in the next result [1]:

PROPOSITION 1.1 *If $|g_0| \geq 2$ and $\mathcal{N}$ consists of pairwise incongruent integers modulo g_0 , then the pair $\{g(t), \mathcal{N}\}$ is a weak number system.*

This weak number system enables us to construct a private key cryptosystem. To do this take $g(t) = t^n + g_{n-1}t^{n-1} + \dots + g_1t + g_0 \in \mathcal{Z}[t]$ with $|g_0| \geq 2$ and a set $\mathcal{N}$ of pairwise incongruent integers modulo g_0 .

For encryption of a plaintext $w = w_0 \dots w_r \in \mathcal{A}_{\mathcal{N}}$ choose integers $l_1, l_2, \dots, l_h$ with $l_1 + l_2 + \dots + l_h = r + 1$. Then cut the word w into subwords $W_1, \dots, W_h$ of $\mathcal{A}_{\mathcal{N}}$ in such a way that $w = W_1 \dots W_h$ and $l(W_i) = l_i$. Then application of the map T gives the cryptogram $Y_1, \dots, Y_h \in \mathcal{Z}^n$, where $Y_i = T(W_i)$ for $i = 1, \dots, h$. The knowledge of the corresponding secret keys $g(t)$ and $\mathcal{N}$ may be used to decrypt the received message. For more details about the corresponding algorithm consult [1].

Unfortunately, this cryptosystem cannot be used as the public key cryptosystem, therefore Pethő suggested the following modification:

Let $\{g(t), \mathcal{N}\}$ be a weak number system constructed by proposition 1.1 such that $0 \in \mathcal{N}$.

Let the height $m(w)$ of the word $w \in \mathcal{A}_{\mathcal{N}}$ be defined by

$$m(w) = \max\{|y_0|, \dots, |y_{n-1}|\},$$

where $T(w) = (y_0, \dots, y_{n-1}) \in \mathcal{Z}^n$. Then take an integer M such that

$$M > 2 \max\{m(w) : w \in \mathcal{A}_{\mathcal{N}}^{n+L}\} \quad (3)$$

and a regular matrix $\mathbf{C}$ over $\mathcal{Z}_M$ satisfying

$$\mathbf{C}\mathbf{G} \neq \mathbf{G}\mathbf{C} \quad \text{over } \mathcal{Z}_M. \quad (4)$$

Finally, define the vectors $\hat{\mathbf{x}}_i$ for $i = 0, 1, \dots, L$ by

$$\hat{\mathbf{x}}_i \equiv \mathbf{x}_{n+i}\mathbf{C} \pmod{M} \quad (5)$$

and the map $\hat{T} : \mathcal{A}_{\mathcal{N}}^L \rightarrow \mathcal{Z}^n$ by

$$\hat{T}(w_0 \dots w_L) = w_0 \hat{\mathbf{x}}_0 + \dots + w_L \hat{\mathbf{x}}_L \quad \text{for } l \leq L. \quad (6)$$

The public part of the Pethő public key cryptosystem consists of the chosen weak number system, $\mathcal{N}$ and vectors $\hat{\mathbf{x}}_0, \hat{\mathbf{x}}_1, \dots, \hat{\mathbf{x}}_L$. To encrypt a plaintext $w = w_0 \dots w_i$ an analogous algorithm can be used, but based on $\hat{T}(w_0 \dots w_i)$ instead on $T(w_0 \dots w_i)$.

Knowing the secret keys $\mathbf{C}$, M one can determine the matrix $\mathbf{C}^{-1}$ over $\mathcal{Z}_M$. We have

$$\widehat{T}(w_0 \dots w_l) = w_0 \widehat{\mathbf{x}}_0 + \dots + w_l \widehat{\mathbf{x}}_l \equiv (w_0 \mathbf{x}_n + \dots + w_l \mathbf{x}_{n+l}) \mathbf{C} \pmod{M}$$

and consequently

$$(y_0, \dots, y_{n-1}) = T(\underbrace{0 \dots 0}_n w_0 \dots w_l) \equiv \widehat{T}(w_0 \dots w_l) \mathbf{C}^{-1} \pmod{M}. \quad (7)$$

Furthermore, using (3) we obtain

$$2|y_i| \leq 2m(\underbrace{0 \dots 0}_n w_0 \dots w_l) < M,$$

which implies

$$|y_i| < M/2 \quad \text{for } i = 0, 1, \dots, n-1 \quad (8)$$

and $y_0, \dots, y_{n-1}$ are uniquely determined. Using the algorithm for decryption (see [1]) we get $0 \dots 0 w_0 \dots w_l$ and then $w_0 \dots w_l$.

This cryptosystem is correct in the sense that the plaintext may be uniquely determined from the encrypted text.

2 A possibility of decryption

We write $\mathbf{A} \equiv \mathbf{B} \pmod{m}$ or $\mathbf{A} \stackrel{(m)}{\equiv} \mathbf{B}$ for the matrices $\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B}$ congruent modulo m .

DEFINITION 2.1 *The square matrices $\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B}$ of order n are called similar modulo m if there exist two square matrices $\mathbf{P}, \mathbf{Q}$ of order n such that $\mathbf{PQ} \stackrel{(m)}{\equiv} \mathbf{QP} \stackrel{(m)}{\equiv} \mathbf{I}$ and $\mathbf{B} \equiv \mathbf{PAQ} \pmod{m}$. We write $\mathbf{A} \sim \mathbf{B} \pmod{m}$.*

PROPOSITION 2.1 *Let $\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B}$ be square matrices of order n and $\text{char}(\mathbf{A}) = t^n + a_{n-1}t^{n-1} + \dots + a_1t + a_0$, $\text{char}(\mathbf{B}) = t^n + b_{n-1}t^{n-1} + \dots + b_1t + b_0$ be their characteristic polynomials. If $\mathbf{A} \sim \mathbf{B} \pmod{m}$, then*

$$a_i \equiv b_i \pmod{m} \quad \text{for } i = 0, 1, \dots, n-1.$$

Now we return to the Pethő public key cryptosystem. Consider the following system of congruences

$$\widehat{\mathbf{x}}_i \equiv \widehat{\mathbf{x}}_{i-1} \mathbf{A} \pmod{M} \quad \text{for } i = 1, 2, \dots, L, \quad (9)$$

where $\mathbf{A}$ is a (unknown) matrix of order n and $M, \widehat{\mathbf{x}}_0, \widehat{\mathbf{x}}_1, \dots, \widehat{\mathbf{x}}_L$ are public keys.

It is not hard to see that the matrix $\mathbf{C}^{-1}\mathbf{G}\mathbf{C}$ is a solution of the system of congruences (9) for

$$\begin{aligned}\widehat{\mathbf{x}}_i &\stackrel{(M)}{\equiv} \mathbf{x}_{n+i}\mathbf{C} = \mathbf{x}_{n+i-1}\mathbf{G}\mathbf{C} \\ &\stackrel{(M)}{\equiv} \mathbf{x}_{n+i-1}\mathbf{C}\mathbf{C}^{-1}\mathbf{G}\mathbf{C} \stackrel{(M)}{\equiv} \widehat{\mathbf{x}}_{i-1}(\mathbf{C}^{-1}\mathbf{G}\mathbf{C}) \quad \text{for } i = 1, 2, \dots, L.\end{aligned}$$

In the rest of the paper we shall find conditions under which it is possible to find M and a solution matrix $\mathbf{A}_0$ of the system (9). The following observations show that this is sufficient to break the Pethő cryptosystem in polynomial time. To see this note:

1. If $\mathbf{A}_0 \equiv \mathbf{C}^{-1}\mathbf{G}\mathbf{C} \pmod{M}$, then by definition 2.1 the matrices $\mathbf{A}_0$ and $\mathbf{G}$ are similar modulo M . Therefore, if $\text{char}(\mathbf{A}_0) = t^n + g'_{n-1}t^{n-1} + \dots + g'_1t + g'_0$ is the characteristic polynomial of the matrix $\mathbf{A}_0$, then by proposition 2.1 we have

$$g'_i \equiv g_i \pmod{M}. \quad (10)$$

Furthermore, we have

$$M > 2|g_i| \cdot |w'| \geq 2|g_i|, \quad (11)$$

where w' is a nonzero element of $\mathcal{N}$, since $\mathbf{x}_n = (-g_0, \dots, -g_{n-1})$. Consequently, $|g_i| < M/2$ for $i = 0, 1, \dots, n-1$ and this together with (10) implies that the coefficients $g_0, g_1, \dots, g_{n-1}$ of the polynomial $g(t)$ are uniquely determined. Thus we can derive the polynomial $g(t)$, the matrix $\mathbf{G}$ and the vectors $\mathbf{x}_i$ ($i = 0, 1, \dots, n+L$) from knowledge of M and $\mathbf{A}_0$.

2. Let $\mathbf{R}_0$ be an arbitrary solution of the system of congruences

$$\widehat{\mathbf{x}}_i\mathbf{R} \equiv \mathbf{x}_{n+i} \pmod{M} \quad \text{for } i = 0, 1, \dots, L \quad (12)$$

with an unknown matrix $\mathbf{R}$. This system is solvable, because $\mathbf{C}^{-1}$ solves it. But it is not necessary to find just the matrix $\mathbf{C}^{-1}$, because any solution matrix $\mathbf{R}_0$ can be used for determining $y_0, \dots, y_{n-1}$ since

$$\begin{aligned}\widehat{T}(w_0 \dots w_l)\mathbf{R}_0 &= (w_0\widehat{\mathbf{x}}_0 + \dots + w_l\widehat{\mathbf{x}}_l)\mathbf{R}_0 \\ &\stackrel{(M)}{\equiv} w_0\mathbf{x}_n + \dots + w_l\mathbf{x}_{n+l} \\ &= T(0 \dots 0w_0 \dots w_l) = (y_0, \dots, y_{n-1})\end{aligned}$$

Due to (8) the numbers $y_0, \dots, y_{n-1}$ are uniquely determined. Now we know all that is necessary for decryption. Applying the decryption algorithm to $(y_0, \dots, y_{n-1}) = T(0 \dots 0w_0 \dots w_l)$ we get $0 \dots 0w_0 \dots w_l$ and consequently $w_0 \dots w_l$.

Thus knowing M and the matrix $\mathbf{A}_0$ we are able to decrypt intercepted messages in polynomial time.

3 How to solve system (9)

Put

$$\mathbf{X} = \begin{pmatrix} \hat{\mathbf{x}}_0 \\ \vdots \\ \hat{\mathbf{x}}_{L-1} \end{pmatrix}, \mathbf{Y} = \begin{pmatrix} \hat{\mathbf{x}}_1 \\ \vdots \\ \hat{\mathbf{x}}_L \end{pmatrix}$$

and rewrite the system of congruences (9) into the matrix form

$$\mathbf{X}\mathbf{A} \equiv \mathbf{Y} \pmod{M}. \quad (13)$$

We can suppose $L \geq n$. In the opposite case (i. e. if $L < n$) this system would reduce to a system of equations, which is easy to solve and we immediately obtain the plaintext.

Reduce the matrix $\mathbf{X}$ of order $L \times n$ over $\mathcal{Z}$ to Smith canonical form. Then we obtain invertible matrices $\mathbf{P}, \mathbf{Q}$ over $\mathcal{Z}$ such that

$$\mathbf{P}\mathbf{X}\mathbf{Q} = \mathbf{D},$$

where $\mathbf{D} = \text{diag}_{L,n}(a_0, \dots, a_{n-1})$ is the matrix of order $L \times n$ with $a_0, \dots, a_{n-1}$ on the main diagonal and $a_i | a_j$ for $i < j$. We may suppose that $a_i \geq 0$ for $i = 0, 1, \dots, n-1$ (in the opposite case multiply the row by -1).

The system (13) can be equivalently rewritten into the form

$$\mathbf{D}\mathbf{B} = \mathbf{P}\mathbf{X}\mathbf{Q}\mathbf{B} \equiv \mathbf{P}\mathbf{Y} \pmod{M}, \quad (14)$$

with an unknown matrix $\mathbf{B}$ such that $\mathbf{A} = \mathbf{Q}\mathbf{B}$.

Note that we do not need to know M in order to be able to reduce the matrix $\mathbf{X}$ to Smith canonical form.

If $\mathbf{B} = \|y_{ij}\|$ and $\mathbf{P}\mathbf{Y} = \|b_{ij}\|$, then the system (14) can be replaced by two systems

$$\begin{aligned} a_0 y_{0,j} &\equiv b_{0,j} \pmod{M} \\ &\vdots \\ a_{n-1} y_{n-1,j} &\equiv b_{n-1,j} \pmod{M} \text{ for } j = 0, \dots, n-1 \end{aligned} \quad (15)$$

and

$$\begin{aligned} 0 &\equiv b_{n,j} \pmod{M} \\ &\vdots \\ 0 &\equiv b_{L-1,j} \pmod{M} \text{ for } j = 0, \dots, n-1. \end{aligned} \quad (16)$$

System (16) is solvable, because e. g. the matrix $\mathbf{Q}^{-1}\mathbf{C}^{-1}\mathbf{G}\mathbf{C}$ is its solution. Thus the following condition must be true:

$$M | b_{k,j} \text{ for } k = n, \dots, L-1; j = 0, \dots, n-1.$$

If we write d for the greatest common divisor of $b_{k,j}$ for all $k = n, \dots, L-1$; $j = 0, \dots, n-1$, then $M|d$.

Similarly, system (15) has also a solution, therefore

$$(a_i, M) = (a_i, M, b_{i,j}) \text{ for } i = 0, \dots, n-1; j = 0, \dots, n-1$$

and this gives a further restriction on M of the type $M|d'$, where $d' \leq d$.

Now we may gradually substitute for M divisors of d' . However, this is possible only provided $d \neq 0$, otherwise the congruences (5) become equalities, i. e. $\hat{\mathbf{x}}_i = \mathbf{x}_{n+i}\mathbf{C}$ for $i = 0, \dots, L$.

Now we suppose that we know M . Put $d_i = (a_i, M)$, $m_i = M/d_i$ for $i = 0, 1, \dots, n-1$. Since $a_i|a_j$ for $i < j$, we have $d_i|d_j$ and $m_j|m_i$ for $i < j$.

The congruence $a_i y_{ij} \equiv b_{ij} \pmod{m_i}$ has exactly d_i solutions incongruent modulo M for all $i, j \in \{0, \dots, n-1\}$. Therefore there are $d_0^n d_1^n \cdots d_{n-1}^n$ solutions incongruent modulo M of the system (14) and also the same number of the system (13).

4 Conclusions

Now we prove the following theorem.

THEOREM 4.1 *Let $\mathbf{X}$ be the matrix of order $L \times n$ defined in section 3 and $L \geq n$. Let the matrix $\mathbf{D} = \text{diag}_{L,n}(a_0, \dots, a_{n-1})$ be its Smith canonical form with $a_i|a_j$ for $i < j$ and $a_i \geq 0$ for $i = 0, 1, \dots, n-1$. Then*

$$(a) \quad (a_0, M) = d_0 = (M, g_0, \dots, g_{n-1})$$

$$(b) \quad (a_0 \cdots a_{n-1}, M) = (M, g_0^n).$$

Proof: The following property of the Smith canonical form will be used.

Let $\Delta_k(\mathbf{A})$ be the greatest common divisor of all minors of k -th order of a matrix $\mathbf{A}$. Given a matrix $\mathbf{A}$ of order $l \times m$, write $\mathbf{D} = \text{diag}_{l,m}(a_0, \dots, a_{n-1})$ for its Smith canonical form. Then (see [2] chapter 16)

$$\begin{aligned} a_0 &= \Delta_1(\mathbf{A}) \\ a_0 a_1 &= \Delta_2(\mathbf{A}) \\ &\vdots \\ a_0 a_1 \cdots a_{n-1} &= \Delta_n(\mathbf{A}). \end{aligned} \tag{17}$$

(a) Put $s = (M, g_0, \dots, g_{n-1})$. We show by induction on i that there is a vector $\mathbf{x}'_{n+i}$ such that $\mathbf{x}_{n+i} = s\mathbf{x}'_{n+i}$ for all $i = 0, 1, \dots, L$. The case $i = 0$ is trivial, because $\mathbf{x}_n = (-g_0, \dots, -g_{n-1})$. Suppose therefore that our assertion is true for $i-1$. The induction hypothesis implies $\mathbf{x}_{n+i} = \mathbf{x}_{n+i-1}\mathbf{G} = s\mathbf{x}'_{n+i-1}\mathbf{G} =$

$s\mathbf{x}'_{n+i}$. Furthermore, we have $\widehat{\mathbf{x}}_i \equiv^{(M)} \mathbf{x}_{n+i}\mathbf{C} = s\mathbf{x}'_{n+i}\mathbf{C}$. Since $s|M$, there exists a vector $\widehat{\mathbf{x}}'_i$ over $\mathcal{Z}$ such that $\widehat{\mathbf{x}}_i = s\mathbf{x}'_i$ for all $i = 0, 1, \dots, L$. Consequently $s|d_0$. There exists a vector $\widehat{\mathbf{x}}''_0$ over $\mathcal{Z}$ with $\mathbf{x}_n\mathbf{C} \equiv^{(M)} \widehat{\mathbf{x}}_0 = d_0\widehat{\mathbf{x}}''_0$. The matrix $\mathbf{C}$ is regular over $\mathcal{Z}_M$, $d_0|M$, thus necessarily there exists a vector $\mathbf{x}''_n$ such that $\mathbf{x}_n = d_0\mathbf{x}''_n$, i. e. $d_0|s$ as claimed.

(b) We have

$$\begin{aligned} & \left| \begin{pmatrix} \widehat{\mathbf{x}}_0 \\ \vdots \\ \widehat{\mathbf{x}}_{n-1} \end{pmatrix} \right| \equiv^{(M)} \left| \begin{pmatrix} \mathbf{x}_n \\ \vdots \\ \mathbf{x}_{2n-1} \end{pmatrix} \mathbf{C} \right| = \\ & = |\mathbf{I}\mathbf{G}^n\mathbf{C}| = |\mathbf{G}|^n|\mathbf{C}| = (-1)^n g_0^n |\mathbf{C}|. \end{aligned}$$

Determine now the value of another minor of n -th order of the matrix $\mathbf{X}$. Let $0 \leq i_0 < \dots < i_{n-1} < L$, then

$$\begin{aligned} & \left| \begin{pmatrix} \widehat{\mathbf{x}}_{i_0} \\ \vdots \\ \widehat{\mathbf{x}}_{i_{n-1}} \end{pmatrix} \right| \equiv^{(M)} \left| \begin{pmatrix} \mathbf{x}_{n+i_0} \\ \vdots \\ \mathbf{x}_{n+i_{n-1}} \end{pmatrix} \mathbf{C} \right| = \\ & = \left| \begin{pmatrix} \mathbf{x}_{i_0} \\ \vdots \\ \mathbf{x}_{i_{n-1}} \end{pmatrix} \mathbf{G}^n \mathbf{C} \right| = \left| \begin{pmatrix} \mathbf{x}_{i_0} \\ \vdots \\ \mathbf{x}_{i_{n-1}} \end{pmatrix} \right| (-1)^n g_0^n |\mathbf{C}|. \end{aligned}$$

This implies

$$a_0 a_1 \cdots a_{n-1} = \Delta_n(\mathbf{X}) = g_0^n |\mathbf{C}|,$$

and since the matrix $\mathbf{C}$ is regular over $\mathcal{Z}_M$ we have $(|\mathbf{C}|, M) = 1$ and in turn

$$(a_0 a_1 \cdots a_{n-1}, M) = (\Delta_n(\mathbf{X}), M) = (M, g_0^n)$$

and the proof is finished.

In section 3 we obtained $d_0^m d_1^n \cdots d_{n-1}^n$ solutions incongruent modulo M of the system (13). But we need one such $\mathbf{A}_0$ for which $\mathbf{A}_0 \equiv \mathbf{C}^{-1}\mathbf{G}\mathbf{C} \pmod{M}$. Thus we arrive at the problem to determine which one among the solutions of (13) satisfies this additional condition.

If $d_{n-1} = 1$, then the system (13) has only one solution and we are able to decrypt. Thus $d_{n-1} = 1$ is a sufficient condition for the determination of the matrix $\mathbf{A}_0$. But there is also a weaker condition for this conclusion.

All the solutions of the system (13) are congruent modulo m_{n-1} . Let $\mathbf{Z}$ be one of them, then $\mathbf{Z} \equiv \mathbf{C}^{-1}\mathbf{G}\mathbf{C} \pmod{m_{n-1}}$. Since $m_{n-1}|M$ and $\mathbf{C}\mathbf{C}^{-1} \equiv^{(M)} \mathbf{C}^{-1}\mathbf{C} \equiv^{(M)} \mathbf{I}$, we have $\mathbf{C}\mathbf{C}^{-1} \equiv^{(m_{n-1})} \mathbf{C}^{-1}\mathbf{C} \equiv^{(m_{n-1})} \mathbf{I}$. According to definition 2.1

we obtain $\mathbf{Z} \sim \mathbf{C}^{-1}\mathbf{G}\mathbf{C} \pmod{m_{n-1}}$. If $\text{char}(\mathbf{Z}) = t^n + g'_{n-1}t^{n-1} + \dots + g'_1t + g'_0$ is the characteristic polynomial of the matrix $\mathbf{Z}$, then $g_i \equiv g'_i \pmod{m_{n-1}}$ for $i = 0, 1, \dots, n-1$ as proposition 2.1 shows. Put $k = \max\{|w| : w \in \mathcal{N}\}$, then we have $M > 2k|g_i|$ for $i = 0, \dots, n-1$ by (11), whence

$$|g_i| < \frac{M/k}{2} \quad \text{for } i = 0, 1, \dots, n-1.$$

Thus if

$$m_{n-1} \geq M/k, \quad \text{resp. } d_{n-1} \leq k, \quad (18)$$

then the coefficients of $g(t)$ are uniquely determined, since

$$|g_i| < \frac{M/k}{2} \leq \frac{m_{n-1}}{2} \quad \text{for } i = 0, \dots, n-1.$$

And now we can decrypt by the same way as in section 2.

According to assertion (b) of theorem 4.1 we have

$$d_{n-1} \leq (a_0 \cdots a_{n-1}, M) = (g_0^n, M).$$

Thus the Pethő public key cryptosystem cannot be used securely if $(g_0^n, M) \leq k$ and therefore it is necessary to choose M in such a way that (g_0^n, M) is sufficiently large.

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