



Headline: It's easy pickings for Macau Scam syndicates
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It's easy pickings for Macau scam syndicates

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KUANTAN: A phone line, list of phone numbers and the gall to impersonate an enforcement officer – that is all that Macau Scam syndicates need to rob victims of millions of ringgit every year.

They threaten potential victims not with physical weapons but a confident, authoritative voice and an elaborate lie.

Those who fall prey to their lies will end up handing over their entire life savings to these criminals.

The Pahang Commercial CID Chief Supt Mohd Wazir Mohd Yusof said in Pahang alone, 111 Macau Scam cases have been reported from January to August this year, with victims being conned out of a total of RM3.97 million.

The figure is an over 105 per cent increase from the 54 cases reported last year.

The amount of losses suffered

by victims has also increased by nearly 200 per cent from the RM1.32 million lost last year.

The number of Macau Scam victims have also increased from only 33 in 2017 to 87 victims this year – an increase of 163 per cent. Majority of the victims are Malays, followed by Chinese (22 people) and Indians (two people).

Trained to deceive

Mohd Wazir said that Macau Scam syndicate members are usually based overseas and are well-versed in the operating procedures of agencies in this country such as the Royal Malaysia Police, the Royal Malaysian Customs Department, Bank Negara and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC).

It is this knowledge that makes them appear credible to the victims.

"They would call random potential victims and pose as an officer of the law working for

Bukit Aman, the police contingent headquarters, the court, bank or MACC.

"As the calls are made over a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) system, scammers are able to manipulate the caller ID and make it seem like it is coming from the agency of their choosing, thus lending credence to their claims.

"The syndicate member would accuse the potential victim of being involved in either money laundering, outstanding loan, hit-and-run or drug related cases, before connecting them to so-called officers from related departments for further information on the offence they have purportedly committed.

"Despite being innocent, victims would become scared hearing that they would be charged in court or have their savings accounts frozen.

"This blind panic causes them to heed the instruction to transfer

their money into an account number given by the scammer," he explained.

Victims were told that their money would be transferred back into their accounts once 'investigations' were over.

They would only come to realise that they have been robbed of their savings when no such transaction occur.

Efforts to call back the number would be an exercise in futility.

Other victims were cheated through money lending schemes advertised on social media.

Victims were oddly willing to pay the 'processing fee' despite it being higher than the amount they wished to borrow – from a source that never existed in the first place.

"The most recent offering under the Macau Scam comes in the form of a job opportunity where 'candidates' were asked to fork out a certain fee to get them a job that doesn't exist," he

said.

Locals unwittingly made 'account mules'

Mohd Wazir admitted that it was difficult for the authorities to trace the stolen money. In many cases, those duped never saw their money again.

"The VoIP system used enables the scammers to change their number within 24 hours and this makes it difficult for the police to trace where the call is coming from. At the moment, the equipment that can be used to trace the calls is only available in Bukit Aman as it is quite costly," he said.

What was more regrettable, he said, was that many of the accounts used to transfer the victims' money into belonged to locals. This made them 'Macau Scam account mules'.

"Our investigations show that members of the syndicate would go to private colleges, posing as students. They would flirt with

female students and eventually convince the latter to give them their personal and bank account details. These female students would be lured by empty promises of gifts and pocket money in return of the temporary use of their bank accounts, unwittingly making them accessory to the crime under Section 420 of the Penal Code," he said.

Mohd Wazir advised female students against allowing anyone to use their bank accounts and personal details for any purpose as it would put them at risk of becoming a victim.

Under Section 420, those convicted can be punished with imprisonment for a term not less than one year and not more than ten years. They will also be liable to whipping and fine. He also warned the public against publishing personal details online to prevent them from becoming potential targets for the Macau Scam. — Bernama