



Headline: Phone scammers target the gullible
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On your side Brian Martin
@KlangRed

Phone scammers target the gullible

The public should be vigilant and take precautionary measures to avoid falling victim to 'tele-scams'.

YOUR phone rings, you answer and an authoritative voice on the other end tells you that your car was involved in a hit-and-run accident a few months ago and the police want you for questioning.

Reeling from this, you start to second guess yourself and try to remember if you actually were involved in an accident.

The "voice" says you are in a lot of trouble and identifies himself as a certain ASP xxx from Bukit Aman.

He proceeds to provide your identity card (IC) number, home address and car registration number.

It's only when this "police officer" offers you a way out from this predicament – a "settlement" involving the transfer of a substantial sum of money – that you begin to suspect something is amiss.

Raise your hands, those of you who have been scammed or been a victim of an attempted scam – either by bogus cops, Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) officers, Bank Negara officials or even Road Transport Department (JPJ) staff.

Incidents of phone scams have become so widespread that chances are you, your family or at least someone you know have been duped.

This is because an increasing number of people are receiving phone calls with the explicit aim of cheating you of your hard-earned money.



Put an end to it: Speaking at the commercial crimes seminar, Zakaria says tele-scams may affect the country's economy. — Bernama

These "tele-scams" often start with a phone call from someone pretending to be an officer from a bank, government agency or debt collector. The scammer will then claim that the potential victim owes money or has an unpaid fine to settle, often with a very short window of less than an hour, or face "dire consequences".

The unsuspecting victims will then be asked to make payments to get them off the hook. The syndicates operating these scams would also pay desperate or unemployed people a token sum to allow them to use their bank accounts to receive

payments from victims.

A colleague, irritated by the frequency of such calls, resorted to lambasting the callers whenever she suspected there were scammers on the other end.

Imagine her embarrassment when she told off a caller who turned out to be a genuine inspector from Bukit Aman!

This particular inspector saw the funny side, but the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) in general are extremely concerned over this issue.

The police say that the country loses an average of RM2bil every year to scammers.

"If we don't do something about this, it may affect our economy," Bukit Aman commercial crimes investigation department director Comm Datuk Seri Mohd Zakaria Ahmad told the media, adding that e-commerce scams and telecommunication fraud topped the list with the most losses.

Comm Zakaria also told the press that he had been targeted by scammers before.

"Even I have gotten those (scam) calls. It was strange as to how they got my details because the information was correct.

"How did they know this information and who gave it to them? This is the problem. We don't know about the sale of data," he said.

He said that the police are worried about such data leaks. The phone numbers used for tele-scams are prepaid ones and these are used only once or twice.

Their investigations reveal that these prepaid numbers are linked to foreigners without personal details like IC or passport numbers.

But what can the cops do? Not much really, short of advising banks and telecommunication companies to tighten security for personal data.

Scammers are hard to pin down because of prepaid numbers and also because they use VOIP, allowing them to duplicate multiple phone numbers.

The police have also advised smartphone users to install mobile

apps that block spam calls and messages. These apps work by gathering phone numbers that have already been reported as bogus.

While there is no guarantee that such apps can completely stop scammers, smartphone users can reduce the risk of getting such phone calls.

The Personal Data Protection Act 2010 regulates and protects the use of personal data collected by companies including banks, hotels and airlines.

An individual who keeps getting tele-scam calls and feels that his personal data may have been processed in breach of any provision of the Act can make a complaint to the Personal Data Protection Commission.

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) has also advised the public to be vigilant and take precautionary measures whenever receiving calls from unknown numbers.

This includes lodging a complaint to the commission on the matter, which can be channelled to aduan-skmm@mcmc.gov.my.

Finally, and this may seem like common sense, the best way to avoid being conned is not to give out your personal details to strangers.

Be wary of phone calls from people in authority and most of all, check the credentials of the caller. The authorities will never conduct an investigation over the phone.