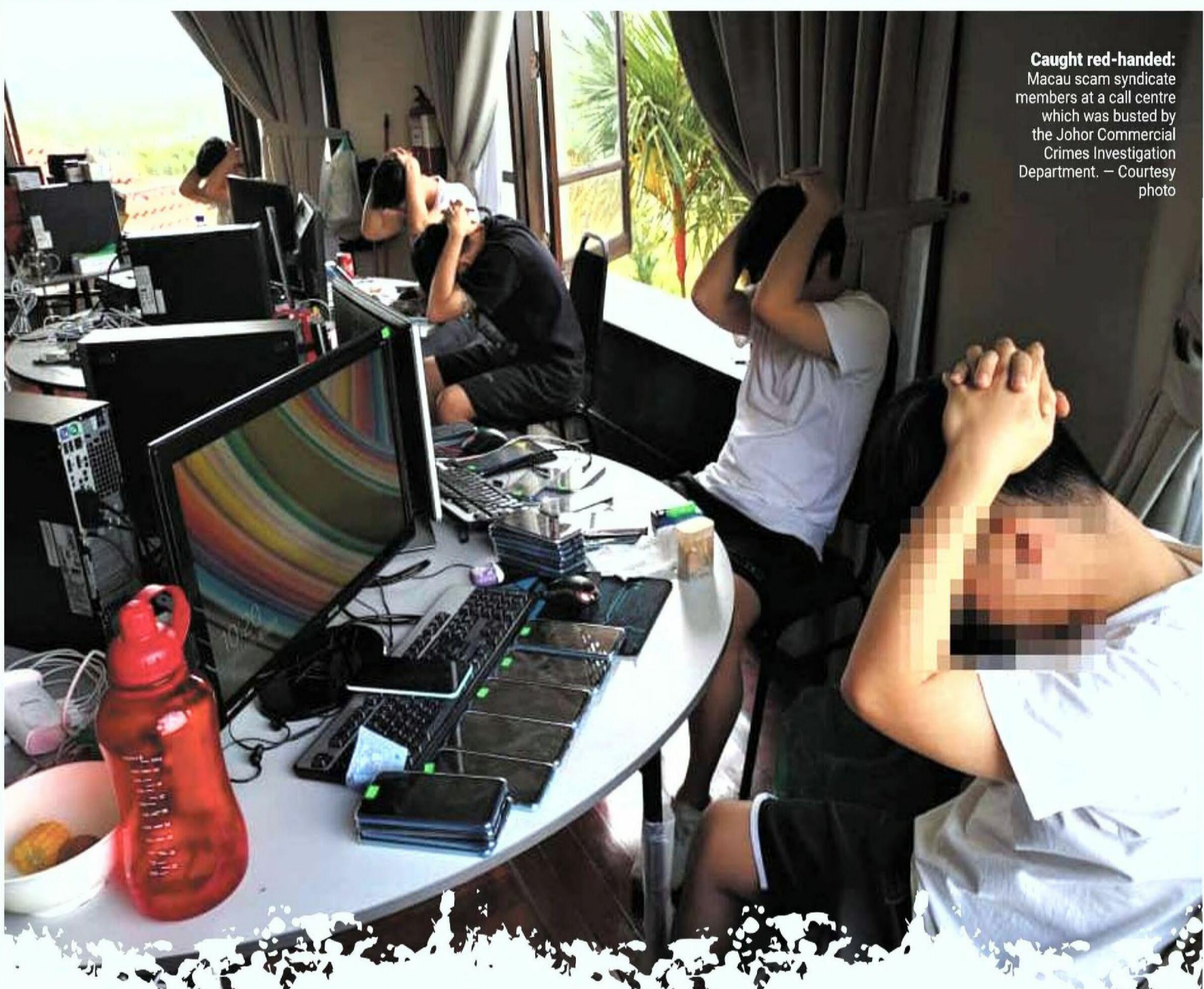


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Page : 1



Caught red-handed: Macau scam syndicate members at a call centre which was busted by the Johor Commercial Crimes Investigation Department. — Courtesy photo

By NELSON BENJAMIN
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FATIMAH (not her real name) received a call from an unknown number with the caller claiming to be an income tax officer alleging that a company registered in her name owed thousands of ringgit in unpaid taxes.

Although she initially dismissed it as a prank call, she stayed on the line because the caller had her personal details, such as her identity card number and address.

"The call was then transferred to a man claiming to be policeman who said that I was involved in illegal money laundering and would face time in prison," she said, adding that she panicked upon hearing this.

Fatimah, a government servant in her 30s, said that the "policeman" even threatened to arrest her at her workplace if she did

Cut the line on scams

Johor police say cybercrime has increased by 40.5% since the borders reopened in April last year. The public is urged to never divulge banking details to strangers over the phone.

not cooperate in the investigation.

"I tried explaining but he was not bothered to listen," she said adding that she was asked to transfer money from her accounts to a "safe account" until the investigation was over.

She said that the scammers were very convincing as they even sent a copy of an arrest warrant with her name via WhatsApp.

"I complied because I was worried about being arrested.

"Within a few days, I transferred out all my savings of more than RM200,000 to various accounts.

"I realised that I was duped after they stopped calling and harassing me.

"I also tried calling them but the number was disconnected," she said, adding that she had read articles about such cases but never expected it could happen to her.

Another victim known as Yong got a call from a man claiming to be a police inspector who wanted to verify if he had used his credit card to purchase Bitcoins.

"I told the man that I did not purchase anything and he told me to lodge a report with Bank Negara," he said, adding that the "policeman" purportedly transferred the line to "Bank Negara" and a woman told him that his card had been forged and misused.

"She then told me to move my money to another account for safe keeping as Bukit Aman was carrying out investigations into possible credit card fraud.

> TURN TO PAGE 3

'Don't be afraid to lodge police reports'

> FROM PAGE 1

"She was very concerned and so convincing that I believed her," he said, adding that he decided to transfer the money to the account numbers provided.

Yong, who is a businessman, only realised he was duped upon calling his bank's call centre and was told not to entertain calls from scammers.

Yong said that it was too late as he had transferred out more than RM600,000.

"I know that I cannot get back my money but I hope the authorities nab such unscrupulous people who spin lies to cheat people," he said, adding that since then he has been advising his family and friends to be careful and hang up when receiving such calls.

MCA Public Services and Complaints Department deputy chief Chua Jian Boon said scam victims should not be shy or afraid to lodge police reports.

He said each report was important for the police to take the necessary action.

"We need continuous enforcement on syndicates who are constantly thinking of new modus operandi to scam people," he said, adding that since last year, the department had received more than 204 reports on scams nationwide including Macau scams.

He said most of the callers were between 26 and 50 years old.

"It is sad that some of the victims were conned of all their life savings," he said adding that people should not easily reveal their banking details to people unknown to them.



Chua: MCA has received more than 204 reports on scams nationwide since last year.

He added that in one case in Johor involving a maintenance worker in his 30s, the victim resorted to borrowing money from friends and relatives to "settle RM15,000" to avoid being arrested and jailed as he was being chased by an "income tax officer".

"My advice to people is to hang up or do not pick up calls from unknown numbers," he said adding that the syndicates were well trained in using scare tactics to intimidate their victims," he said.

"I have received calls from people impersonating policemen and income tax officers too. I just hang up."

Chua said government officials especially from the Internal Revenue Department do not deal with taxpayers over the telephone but would send out official letters.



Johor police have made numerous arrests at syndicate-run call centres which are often located in housing estates and outskirts.

He urged the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) to tighten personal data protection laws as there were still loopholes in the regulations.

"I found out that by paying RM200 one can get 500 personal information data," he said, adding that this was among ways scammers got hold of potential victims' details.

He added that MCA was also doing its part by carrying out awareness programmes to educate the public by distributing pam-

phlets and brochures as well as uploading videos on social media on ways to avoid scammers.

"I also commend the Johor Commercial Crimes Investigations Department for carrying out public awareness programmes and for the Semak Mule application which is helpful to the public," he added.

Chua said other scams prevalent now include those offering loans or even lucrative job opportunities overseas.

Those in need of advice can call 07-3630 008 (MCA hotline) during office hours.