

Online scam syndicates paying RM500 each for mule accounts

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PUTRAJAYA: Crimes involving online scams have been on the rise of late, with losses reportedly running into millions of ringgit.

Records show that more than 25,000 online cheating cases were recorded last year involving losses of approximately RM850 million.

National Anti-Financial Crime Centre (NFCC) director-general Datuk Seri Mustafar Ali said one of the contributing factors to online criminal activities is the existence of mule accounts.

“One factor causing scam syndicates to milk money from their victims is the existence of mule accounts ‘bought’ at RM500 per account from the original account holders for use to transfer the ill-gotten gains.

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“A victim’s money that has been defrauded will be put into a mule account and then transferred to several other mule accounts before finally being withdrawn in a short period of time, making it difficult to track,” he told *Bernama* recently.

‘Account mules’ are individuals who hand over their Automated Teller Machine (ATM) cards and pin numbers to others for the purpose of being used in criminal activities.

Mustafar said the surge in cases was also driven by the use of technology and social media in perpetrating scams as well as the leaking of user information.



Commenting on frauds through social media, he said scammers would contact victims through social media like WhatApps and Telegram and also impersonate contacts or authorities through Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and other social media applications.

The latest tactic of scammers is to give a link disguised as a bank website or ask the victim to

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KOTA KINABALU: In 2017, Sabah Shell Petroleum Co Ltd (SSPC) launched Access to Energy (A2E), a Shell Social Investment programme aimed at providing affordable and continuous supply of electricity from renewable sources for communities who live without connection to the electricity grid.

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download an application to secure a certain service.

"The victim will next be asked to disclose personal information including banking particulars, allowing the scammer to hack into the victim's account and siphon off their money," he said.

Mustafar said the occurrence of online fraud cases was closely linked to victims' backgrounds, for example the 'Macau Scam' targets individuals with large savings while e-commerce cheating involves buyers and sellers.

"Criminals use various tricks to get banking information from victims and the situation becomes even more complicated when the victims are slow to realise that their money has disappeared.

"The losses suffered not only have a negative impact on the national economy but can also spark social problems in general," he said.

He said analysis by enforcement agencies showed that fraud syndicates used phone numbers that were illegally obtained from unscrupulous parties selling consumers' personal information.

According to him, the government has been taking specific measures to combat online crimes, including enhancing cooperation with international authorities to ensure further action can be taken against criminals who operate from abroad.

"Such scams need to be dealt with jointly by all parties, including those who have fallen victim. Awareness campaigns should be conducted from the school to university levels with the holding of specific programmes to educate people to avoid falling prey to scammers," he said.

Mustafar also said the government intends to strengthen the National Scam Response Centre (NSRC) in terms of operations, manpower resources, centralised data systems, office infrastructure, technical equipment and financial analysis systems.

"Given that the NSRC operations pool the manpower and expertise of various agencies, including banking and telecommunications, an effective integrated enforcement action can be implemented.

"Among actions that can be taken is seizure or restriction of the flow of proceeds of online crimes," he said.

He said the government is seriously examining some legal provisions that can be used or amended for the purpose of enabling fraud money to be returned to the victims.

Among the provisions being examined are the Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001, Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, when presenting Budget 2023, announced an allocation of RM10 million as operating grants for NSRC to strengthen its role.