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## Swayed by scammers' 'local accent and professionalism'

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Their local accent and professional mannerisms are so convincing that the common person would find it difficult to immediately distinguish scammers from genuine law enforcement personnel.

Lee (not his real name), 26, lost almost RM40,000 last year after scammers managed to convince him that he had multiple criminal offences to his name.

He said it all began when he received a phone call at 5am from a person claiming to be an officer from the Inland Revenue Board.

The so-called officer told him he had unpaid taxes for a business registered under his name in Perak.

The call, he said, was then directed to a police station which had a local office number to it.

"The officer-in-charge who spoke to me agreed to log the report. However, he told me that the company registered to me had numerous criminal cases linked to it.

"He then directed me to another person, supposedly a police investigator, who told me that my MyKad number was linked to a number of crimes.

"He threatened to send the po-

lice to arrest me at my home.

"A combination of fear and sleep deprivation made me panic. In the end, I agreed to an 'interrogation' over the phone," he said, adding that the gruelling interrogation took five hours.

Lee admitted that his ignorance played a part in him going along with the process as he had no idea how the police worked.

In the end, Lee was told to download an app and provide his bank account details.

"They told me they would transfer all the money to a 'safe account' to ensure it was clean."

He said he was also taken in as all the people he spoke to sounded Malaysian and appeared professional.

"The police head, in particular, sounded exactly what you would expect a senior veteran to sound like — mature, a deep voice and calm, and the way they went about it felt legitimate.

"They also gave their 'police ID number' and name which sounded legit. I could not check as there was no way to verify a police officer's ID in Malaysia," he said.

Lee realised that something was off after hours of begging them to verify that they were in-

deed the police.

"He finally sent me a photo of the supposed investigator in charge.

"After a quick Google image search, I found that it was from an old article from a Malay paper and the officer's name was not the same," he said.

Victims of such scams can also include those who are familiar with their modus operandi.

Journalist Hazween Hassan, 37, has read and edited countless articles on how people have fallen for Macau scams.

It never crossed her mind that she would become a victim as well.

In Hazween's case, she had answered a phone call from a person claiming that there was an unclaimed parcel linked to her. She was directed to press a number to speak to a customer service agent.

A man answered and told her about the parcel, allegedly sent by her, to an address where she no longer lived.

The man added that the parcel had been impounded by the Customs Department as it contained contraband items.

"He said it was sent out from a



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town or city that I coincidentally had been to recently. This was their first bait and they got it right.

"When I replied that I didn't know who the sender was, they told me to lodge a police report as someone had misused my identity to courier the contraband.

"The call was then forwarded to someone who claimed to be the police," she said.

Hazween said the scammers were convincing and persistent.

"The hours she was forced to spend on the phone with them eventually saw her cave in.

"It was a Saturday morning and I had a long week. I was tired, I didn't have my guard up and they capitalised on it."

Pressured by the scammers to act, she transferred RM17,000 of her savings to a bank account which the scammers claimed belonged to Bank Negara Malaysia, supposedly to safeguard her funds.