



Headline: Make the right call on phoney calls  
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# Make the right call on phoney calls

Despite the publicity over the Macau Scam, M'sia remains a good hunting ground for conmen

THEY call it telemarketing, and most of us have been bothered three or four times a week by pesky telco and credit card marketing representatives

There is very little data protection and it is inevitable that your personal contact details are in the system, mined by big data players to whomever pays for it. We can rant or rave about these irritating calls, but there is not much you can do about it.

But there is a far more dangerous trend. An increasing number of people are receiving phone calls with the explicit aim of cheating you of your hard earned money. The police say that there are at least 30 reported cases a day of Malaysians being cheated via the mobile phone.

The actual number could easily be double that because many victims do not make police reports. The cops have termed these sort of cases, the Macau Scam.

The numbers are staggering. Selangor police chief Comm Datuk Mazlan Mansor said there were 523 such cases reported this year as of August, with losses estimated at about RM29mil in the state alone.

In Penang, there have been 520 cheating cases committed through fake phone calls, involving losses of RM27mil since 2016.

The term "Macau Scam" was coined because it is believed that it originated from Macau or that the first victims came from there. This has never been confirmed. It has been categorised as a telecommunication fraud whereby the perpetrators are part of a syndicate from Taiwan and China that are using local and international lines from Hong Kong.

The scam often starts with a phone call from someone pretending to be an officer from a bank, a government agency or a debt collector.

The scammer claims that the potential victim owes him money or has an unpaid fine, often with a very short window of less than an hour to settle the payment or face "dire consequences".

These unsuspecting victims will then be asked to make payments so that they will be off the hook.

The money must go into bank accounts whose numbers are provided by the callers. These syndicates pay drug addicts and the unemployed to use their bank accounts to receive payments from the victims.

The Macau Scammers seem to favour posing as police, Bank Negara or Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) officers. Incidences have become so widespread that chances are you, your family or at least someone you know has been duped.

Incredibly, many people are conned by this scam despite repeated police warnings. The cops say the majority of the victims are 51 years old and above and some have also resorted to using their EPF savings to 'settle' their non-existent debts.

Mazlan said despite the police publicising the Macau Scam, he was baffled as to how the Selangor figures rose, adding that a recent victim, a lecturer, lost RM500,000.

This is definitely a worrying trend. I know two people who almost fell victim to this. The

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first, my wife, received a call from an "Inspector Noraini" who claimed my wife was involved in a hit-and-run incident in Butterworth.

"I was convinced because she had my previous car registration number and my IC details. But I became suspicious when the 'inspector' insisted on getting my bank account details," my wife shared with me.

"In the end, I said I wanted to go the police station myself to settle the matter and I was given the Jalan Tun H.S Lee station's number. When I called they told me that it was a scam and that there were numerous other people who had been conned."

A colleague also told me of another incident. He had used a WiFi hotspot and was surprised that his phone sent him a reminder a short while later to call a number. When he did, he was told that he had been implicated in a cheating case.

"As a journalist, I instantly suspected that something wasn't right. But I played along because I was intrigued," he said.

Eventually he was transferred to "Bukit Aman" (the police headquarters) to settle the matter and the officer on the other end of the line told him to bank in RM50,000 to an account. "That was when I decided to end the conversation, but only after I gave the guy a piece of my mind," he added.

In these days when scammers use every trick in the book, even seasoned professionals are not spared.

Senior lawyer S. Radhakrishnan told *The Star* that a "senior police officer" almost convinced him that he was involved in a money-laundering probe.

"This 'police officer' knew all my personal details, but I was lucky that I checked with my friend," he said, adding that he almost fell for the scam.

He said he then lodged a police report. "I am thankful I escaped being duped, but I know that a lot of people are not so lucky," he said.

Circus showman PT Barnum famously said that 'there's a sucker born every minute'. The Macau Scam's rising figures show that Malaysians are certainly among the most gullible.

**This is a public service announcement. Do not give out your personal details to strangers, be wary of phone calls from people who claim to be in authority and most of all, check the credentials of the caller.**