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Scammers going into overdrive during pandemic

PETALING JAYA: As more Malaysians are reeling from the economic fallout due to the Covid-19 pandemic, scammers are also going into overdrive to make a fast buck.

According to reports, there was a 20% increase in phone or Macau scam cases during the movement control order (MCO) period from March 18 to May 18, with losses amounting to RM480,000.

These figures are expected to increase further as many Malaysians, particularly retirees and senior citizens, have since fallen victims to these fraudsters.

Kuala Lumpur Crime Prevention Practitioner Association chairperson Bok Siew Mun said scammers were having a field day.

"They just need to pick up the phone and make some calls.

"Out of 10 random calls, one may end up taking the bait," he said in an interview, where he shared a

recent experience when an unidentified caller, who pretended to be a distant friend, claimed he had lost his old number.

"The caller simply cooked up a name, who happened to be a person I knew but one whom I have not been keeping in touch that often, and asked me to update his new number in my contact list.

"The next day, he called up again and asked for a soft loan of RM15,000 to settle an emergency.

"I sensed something amiss, quickly ended the call and blocked the number," he said.

Bok said he believed scammers were now changing tactics from using a voice recorded machine to making calls to dupe potential victims.

"We would like to remind people of these scammers on the prowl, targeting students, those vulnerable, home-bound and not aware about the tactics of scammers.

"If their voice sounds different, or claim to be some government officials, chances are very high they are fraudsters," he said, adding that among other cyber fraud were misuse of personal data, online scam and soft loan scam.

Bok also urged the people to be cautious before clicking on any links or making payments, and to keep themselves updated on the latest trends.

The public can contact the Bukit Aman Commercial Crimes Investigation Department infoline (including using WhatsApp and SMS) at 013-2111 222 to report any suspicious calls.

The police have since highlighted these cases and also reminded the people to be wary when receiving suspicious calls.

In June, a 90-year-old retiree lost a whopping RM3.83mil after fraudsters duped her into transferring the money to them in seven transac-

tions for allegedly getting involved in money laundering.

Last month, a 50-year-old businessman lost almost RM2.8mil after he was cheated by two syndicate members, impersonating as a police officer and a Pos Laju official.

In the latest case, a 71-year-old retired teacher lost RM1.06mil after she got scammed using the same tactic.

The Macau scam often starts 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, has an unpaid fine, or is involved in undesirable activities, with the offer to settle the matter by making payments within a very short window, typically less than an hour, with the warning they will face "dire consequences" if they failed.