



Headline: Hello! You've been scammed
Publication/Portal: The Star
Date: 30 September 2020

Language: English
Section: Nation
Page: 11

IT came at the most inopportune time – in the face of rising Covid-19 infections that necessitated the control of movement throughout the nation, a sudden rash of scams started plaguing unsuspecting citizens cloistered indoors.

During times like these, scammers recognise our reliance on the Internet, social media and our smartphones as we work from home or stay in touch with loved ones far away, and on our increased reliance on online shopping.

Some of these scammers use fear on citizens, with threats that the police are ready to lock them up for illegal activities, such as money laundering or drug trafficking, unless they prove their innocence by surrendering their account numbers and passwords to “Bank Negara” (BNM) so that their bank accounts can be verified for their innocence.

However in investigations, BNM doesn't need individual consent.

Scammers also target those who value financial security, using investment opportunities to hook and reel in their victims – spawning schemes and promises of doubling or tripling returns for a hefty start-up capital, which when paid to them is lost for good.

Some pose as financial or bank officers who offer services for facilitating financial aid or assisting in loan applications and securing financing involving the Government's stimulus package and special relief measures.

Still some prey on lonely individuals who are more susceptible during the isolation, chatting them up via email or dating apps.

They tug at their victims' heartstrings, serenading siren songs of destitution and pleas of financial assistance, the conclusion of which always ends with heartbreak and a whole lump sum of stolen money.

HELLO! YOU'VE BEEN SCAMMED

In an age of uncertainty, frauds and scams flourish



In light of the increasing trend in scams and frauds, it is best to take a wary look at all electronic transactions, from personal, official or commercial.

Unwittingly banking on a fraud

One of the ways that scammers target victims is by using Bank Negara Malaysia's (BNM) reputation as the financial overseer of the country.

Scammers would use short message service (SMS) claiming to be from BNM, directing unsuspecting victims to a website that requires them to enter their personal information, which hackers will eventually exploit.

Similarly, the banking community have also voiced out concerns, especially after the government's announcement of the post-Covid-19

stimulus packages and relief measures from BNM.

On April 20, a joint statement by the Association of Banks in Malaysia (ABM), Association of Islamic Banking and Financial Institutions (Aibim), and Association of Development Finance Institutions of Malaysia (Adfirm) cautioned members of the public and businesses, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), that scammers would go as far as impersonating bank officers or representatives to engage with victims via email, phone call, SMS and social messaging platforms such as WhatsApp.

These scammers would claim to

facilitate financial aid or assist in loan application preparation and help secure financing.

To that end, BNM advises citizens to ignore such messages or anything similar, saying it never requests personal information or clarifications via SMS, telephone call, email, social media or any messaging app.

The public can call 1300-88-5465 or email bnmtelexlink@bnm.gov.my to report or enquire about suspicious text messages, emails or instant messages received in relation to BNM.

Meanwhile, the banking association urges the public to directly contact individual banks concerning relief measures and stimulus packages, instead of pandering to incoming tele-propositions.

A case of fool's gold

In the world economy, gold has endured the onslaught of drifting changes.

Gold has even held steadfast in the face of the pandemic, while oil prices took a nose-dive.

It comes as no surprise then that investment scams involving gold are abundant.

One major one that still has legal repercussions today is the Geneva gold scam.

That began nearly 10 years ago, involving a gold trading company that had allegedly practised money laundering and illegal deposit-taking related to gold bullion investments.

Many of the victims were retirees who used their hard-earned Employees Provident Fund (EPF)

savings, thinking this would be a get-rich-quick scheme to ensure a solid future for themselves.

But till this day, other gold scams exist – in May, a woman was scammed out of nearly RM90,000 when she was conned into joining a gold investment scheme via social media.

Nurture a healthy skepticism

Authorities such as the police have already formed several task forces with Bank Negara, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), Cybersecurity Malaysia, financial institutions and telecommunication industry players to crack down on the ongoing scams and frauds.

An example is the July 7 police raid on a premise in Mount Austin, Johor, that was allegedly used by a Macau scam syndicate as a call centre.

Even so, such crimes are an ongoing battle that Malaysians need to be wary of with every interaction and transaction.

They should also use unique passwords and change those on a regular basis, as well as enabling two-factor authentication on all accounts.

When it comes to investors who aim to win big, most financial advisers advise to avoid plans with unrealistic returns and be wary of push persuasive tactics.

They should also check with the Securities Commission as it is the regulator of the sale of investment products and services.