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Scammers hunting for victims on social media

GEORGE TOWN: After countless successful raids against Macau scam syndicates, fraudsters have started adopting new modus operandi to get people to part with their money.

Penang Commercial Crime chief Asst Comm Mohd Rosni Mohd Lazim said scammers would now swindle their victims via social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp or WeChat, instead of the traditional face-to-face approach.

He said the situation was further aggravated as more people were now using online transactions.

"In the past, we had the pyramid investment schemes where victims attend briefings before parting with their money, or the 'scratch and win' contests where the victims were approached on the streets.

"Today, the victims would fall prey to financial scam advertisements on social media," he said.

ACP Rosni said police have recorded 342 cases in Penang in 2019 and 2020, with losses amounting to RM17mil.

"Till March this year, Penang has recorded another 37 cases related to the Macau scam, with losses amounting to RM699,937.

"The amount of losses from the



Macau scam is among the highest compared to other commercial crimes involving individuals," he said.

Citing an example in Penang last year, ACP Rosni said a 76-year-old woman lost RM1.84mil to comment after she was duped into believing that a parcel she had sent out contained illegal items.

He said the woman was contacted by a "policeman", who said it was suspected she was involved in a RM1.48mil money-laundering syndicate.

Out of fear, she complied with his instructions, including depositing RM1.84mil in five transactions in July last year.

Faceless predators:

ACP Rosni says scammers today are on the prowl online to find potential victims.
— K.T.GOH/
The Star

It was reported that some of the money was inherited, some raised from pawning jewellery and some borrowed from her siblings.

When she ran out of money, she sought help from her son who suspected something amiss and lodged a police report.

ACP Rosni said the syndicate would target victims who were above 40 years old and wealthy.

"Scammers would often pose as enforcement officers from the police, Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, Pos Malaysia or Bank Negara.

"They instil fear in their victims, who would then part with their money that goes into mule accounts.

"As victims are convinced to keep the matter a secret, it is always too late when they eventually find out. They would have depleted their accounts by then," he said.

ACP Rosni said despite much effort to raise awareness, the public still fell easily for such scams

"Police will never ask anyone to reveal their banking information or conduct financial transactions via phone.

"We will only summon a person to a police station to facilitate investigation," he said.

The term "Macau scam" was coined because it is believed to have originated from Macau or that the first victims came from there. This has never been confirmed.

Macau scams often start with a phone call from someone pretending to be an officer from a bank, government or law enforcement agency or debt collector.

The scammer will then claim that the potential victim owes 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 to get off the hook.