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Socso hit with 683 false claims from years 2018-2022

PETALING JAYA: In just five years, from 2018 to 2022, the Social Security Organisation (Socso) detected 683 cases of fraudulent claims amounting to RM43mil.

In some cases, people even try using a dead person's number to make claims, said Socso chief executive Datuk Seri Dr Mohammed Azman Aziz Mohammed.

Of the 683 cases, 487 are being investigated further; from that, 318 cases – or 65.3% – totalling RM28.8mil have been repudiated.

With this action, Socso has managed to save about RM86mil in terms of future savings for the organisation, Mohammed Azman revealed to *The Star*.

Fraudulent claims are a bane to Socso, and protecting its funds from them involves tedious data mining that reveals discrepancies like sharing of addresses, localities and phone numbers by claimants.

The organisation's Anti-Fraud System has accumulated millions

of data bytes since its inception in 2017.

However, Mohammed Azman said that as they continue to build the system with more data, it is difficult to ascertain the actual amount of losses caused by fraudulent claims.

When asked how detrimental fraudulent claims can be for Socso, Mohammed Azman said that even though the organisation has a reasonable amount of assets, it may not be enough to sustain it and be relevant in the long term.

This is due to its commitment of roughly RM5bil for all benefit payments given out to insured persons (workers covered by Socso) or their dependants, Mohammed Azman explained.

For example, if an insured person earns RM5,000 a month, his or her contribution under the scheme is RM49.50 every month, based on the employees' contribution rate of roughly 1% of their monthly salary.

"If he is certified as an invalid

"In any case of suspected fraud, we will resubmit the case to the board for verification again."

Datuk Seri Dr Mohammed Azman Aziz Mohammed

by the Medical Board due to his illness and fulfils the invalidity claim requirements, he will receive an invalidity pension up to RM3,217 a month for life.

"If the worker dies and he has a wife as well as children, Socso will support his family with a survivor's pension given to his

dependants for life, and to his children until they are 21 years old or married, whichever is earlier.

"If the worker's wife is 30 years old at the time of his death, that pension would amount to about RM1mil eventually.

"This is the kind of long-term liability we have to commit to under Act 4. That is why we need to monitor fraudulent claims closely," he said, referring to the Employees' Social Security Act 1969.

Mohammed Azman also said that retrieving payments poses a difficulty due to claims lapsing over time; as such, stopping payments as a first step is the best option in most fraud cases that are detected.

"When an invalidity claim comes in, we will process it and bring the claimant before the JD (Medical Board) to determine the claimant's invalidity.

"If he is certified invalid, Socso will make the payment, but after the benefit payment is made, we

will analyse the data again.

"In any case of suspected fraud, we will resubmit the case to the board for verification again. If the case is a straightforward one with an admission of guilt, Socso will immediately stop payments," he said.

Mohammed Azman pointed out that the organisation has a zero tolerance policy towards abuse of claims, and the goal is to minimise it as much as possible.

To achieve this, he said Socso has a supervision plan in place and also monitors transactions and carries out surveillance.

Socso has also adopted the Anti-Bribery Management System certification to deter attempts to bribe its officers.

"We also use data science and artificial intelligence and establish close cooperation with the police and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission to prevent fraudulent claims and take action against the culprits," he said.

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Crime syndicates targeting Socso

Many fraudsters benefiting from false claims

Stories by FAZLEENA AZIZ
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PETALING JAYA: From single individuals faking injuries to entire syndicates making false claims, more and more unscrupulous people are targeting the Social Security Organisation (Socso).

The highest fraudulent claim so far involved 27 people and payments of RM1.6mil, chief executive Datuk Seri Dr Mohammed Azman Aziz Mohammed revealed to *The Star*.

This translates to long-term losses of RM5mil if Socso had continued payments for the required period.

"This syndicate was discovered in 2017/2018, and had been operating in Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Johor, Penang, Pahang and Kuala Lumpur. It was a father-son duo

running it as a 'business'.

"They had been operating for quite some time under the pretext of a non-governmental organisation, where they collect information from targeted sick and vulnerable people.

"What they do is, they take these sick persons to the hospital but they put their own names down.

"Once they obtain the invalidity pension, they only give a fraction of the benefit payment to the actual sick people, and even keep their ATM cards," he said.

He added that, based on Socso's investigations, the fraudster's whole family had received invalidity benefits.

In March 2018, the main culprits behind the syndicate were arrested, including the father and eight others. The case is still in court.

Then there was the man who came into a Socso office in a wheelchair but who actually drove a Vellfire and led an extravagant lifestyle, including travelling overseas, all the while collecting about RM30,000 a month in benefit payments.

"It is sad to know that some people use these fraudulent methods to sustain their lives instead of working honestly.

"The main purpose of Socso benefits is to assist workers suffering from invalidity so they can get on with their lives but these people abuse it," he said.

The abuse is so organised that some people make fraudulent claims using the service of touts and runners for a fee of between RM9,000 and RM16,000 a person.

"There is no need to use third parties to make claims," said Mohammed Azman.



"I would also like to advise insured persons and their dependants to go to any of Socso's 54 offices nationwide to make Socso claims free of charge instead of using a third party's service.

"You can always get in touch with Socso customer service at

1300 22 8000.

"We are always prepared to help," he added.

Mohammed Azman stressed that anyone making a fraudulent Socso claim can be charged under the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009 and the Penal Code.

5 APRIL 2023 | WEDNESDAY | PAGE: 12

Teacher loses RM78,000 to scammer for fake part-time job

MELAKA: A teacher's dream of earning some side income turned into a nightmare after she was cheated of RM78,000 in an online scam offering fake part-time jobs. Alor Gajah OCPD Supt Arshad

Abu said the 27-year-old victim had lodged a report at the Masjid Tanah police station on Monday. "The victim was first offered the job by a person who identified herself as 'Yasmin' on March 31

through WhatsApp," he said.

Supt Arshad said the teacher was then asked to "invest" in the same company in order to convince the other shareholders. He said the victim was told her

investment would also qualify her to earn additional money and other perks.

"The victim transferred her savings between April 1 and April 2 to a bank account provided by

the fraudster," he said.

The teacher realised she was scammed when her communication with the scammer went silent as soon as she had deposited the money.

9 APRIL 2023 | SUNDAY | PAGE: 10

Dr Zaliha: 'Sick' hospital projects to get treatment

By MUGUNTAN VANAR
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KOTA KINABALU: Among the 12 Health Ministry hospital development projects nationwide that are delayed, three are in Sabah.

Health Minister Dr Zaliha Mustafa said these three "sick" projects in Sabah were Papar Hospital, Beaufort Hospital and the Sikuati health clinic in Kudat. Based on the latest update, she said the construction of Papar

Hospital was delayed by about three months while Beaufort Hospital was delayed by 18 months and the Sikuati health clinic by almost nine months.

She said the three projects were among the 12 "sick" projects under the ministry across the country.

As for the Papar Hospital extension, Dr Zaliha said the RM98.5mil project that began in 2017 was only 62% completed.

"It is a bit behind time. It should be about 70% completed

by now," she told reporters yesterday after she visited the project site in Papar about 40km from here.

She said that one of the reasons for the delay was the Covid-19 pandemic, as the project could not be carried out for about three years.

"But there are also other factors and these include contractors having problems getting workers as well as building materials.

"We will continue to monitor the situation and hold discussions

with the Public Works Department, contractors and other stakeholders to ensure the project moves forward," she added.

Dr Zaliha said she was hopeful that various problems related to mechanical and electrical issues would be resolved by next month and the project completed by the end of the year.

She said she hopes the extension of the Papar Hospital would be operational by March next year.

"The new Papar Hospital building will be able to benefit more than 100,000 residents around the area," she added.

The upgrading of Papar Hospital involved the construction of a ward to provide an additional 84 beds, as well as a paediatric ward, a women's ward, and a male ward.

In addition, the hospital would be better equipped with emergency and trauma services, imaging, satellite pharmacy and other facilities.

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Former Perlis MB denies making false claims

Datuk Seri Azlan Man is facing charges involving RM1.185mil for trips to England which he allegedly did not make. >5

Former Perlis MB charged

Azlan denies submitting false claims for London trips

By IMRAN HILMY
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KANGAR: Former Perlis mentri besar Datuk Seri Azlan Man claimed trial to five counts of submitting false claims amounting to RM1.185mil for his trip to England from 2013 to 2017.

Azlan, 65, pleaded not guilty to the charges before Sessions Court judge Norsalha Hamzah yesterday.

The claims were meant for accommodation, transportation and flight tickets to London for a period of five years.

As a mentri besar then, he was entitled to an annual paid holiday overseas.

He, however, allegedly did not make the trips.

In the first charge, Azlan is alleged to have deceived the Perlis government by submitting an invoice of RM230,230 from travel agency Sri Kedawang Travel and Tours (W) Sdn Bhd dated Dec 11, 2013.

He is said to have falsely claimed the amount for his return flight tickets, hotel stay and transportation in London from Dec 20, 2013 to Jan 2, 2014.

For the second charge, he is accused of deceiving the state government by submitting flight tickets and hotel quotation for a trip to London from the same travel agency dated Nov 20, 2014.

The former mentri besar also submitted a state government's



No comment:
Azlan trying to avoid the media after he was charged in the Kangar Sessions Court.

purchasing order dated Dec 5, 2014 and an invoice from the same agency dated Dec 17, 2014 for flight tickets and accommodation in London, amounting to RM216,260.

He did not travel there from Dec 17 to Dec 26, 2014.

For the third charge, he is accused of deceiving the state government by submitting flight ticket and hotel quotation for a trip to London dated Nov 26, 2015.

He also submitted a state government purchasing order dated Dec 9, 2015 and an invoice dated Dec 21, 2015 for a similar trip worth RM241,295.40 for flight tickets and hotel stay in London from Dec 18 to Dec 29, 2015.

For the fourth charge, Azlan is accused of deceiving the state government by submitting flight

tickets and hotel quotation dated Dec 14, 2016 from Aidil Travel and Tours Sdn Bhd, a state government purchasing order dated Dec 19, 2016 and an invoice from the travel agency dated Dec 29, 2016.

The false claim, amounting to RM253,195, was meant for return flight tickets to London and hotel stay from Dec 23, 2016 to Jan 1, 2017.

Under the fifth charge, he is said to have deceived the state government by submitting flight tickets and hotel quotation dated Nov 8, 2017 from Aidil Travel and Tours, a state government purchasing order dated Nov 17, 2017 and an invoice from the travel agency dated Nov 30, 2017 with false claims amounting to RM244,079.30 for return flight tickets to London and hotel stay

from Nov 23 to Nov 30, 2017.

All the charges were framed under Section 18 of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2009.

The offence, punishable under Section 24 of the same law, provides for imprisonment of not more than 20 years and a fine of not less than five times the value or RM10,000, whichever is higher, upon conviction.

The court granted RM50,000 bail in one surety. Azlan was also ordered to surrender his passport.

Deputy public prosecutor Ahmad Akram Gharib prosecuted while Azlan was represented by lawyers Burhanudeen Abdul Wahid and Ramli Shariff.

Norsalha fixed May 12 for next mention.

Azlan is also expected to face charges under the Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Illegal Activities Act tomorrow.

He was the state's ninth mentri besar from 2013 to 2022.

He first won the Pauh state seat in 2013 before winning the Bintong state seat in 2018.

He failed to retain Bintong in the 15th General Election last year.



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Unclaimed money at RM11bil

Interest earned from fixed deposit investment channelled back to rakyat

PUTRAJAYA: There is approximately RM11bil in unclaimed money (WTD) belonging to the public as of March this year, said Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan.

He said the amount was out of the RM14.1bil received by the Accountant-General's Department (JANM) from companies or firms in accordance with Section 8 of the Unclaimed Money Act (Act 370) from 1977 to last month.

"Of the total amount, about RM3.2bil, such as in savings accounts, insurance and deposits, were refunded to owners.

"A large portion of the RM11bil

in WTD was invested by the government in fixed deposits in accordance with the Financial Procedure Act 1957.

"The interest earned (from fixed deposits) is accounted for under the Consolidated Revenue Account.

"From that fixed deposit, we got RM250mil in interest, which was used for the rakyat," Bernama reported Ahmad said after his visit to JANM yesterday.

He said WTD is defined as money that is legally payable to the owner but has remained unpaid for a period of not less than one year or money standing

to the credit of an account that has not been operated in whatever manner by the owner for a period of not less than seven years.

It also includes money in credit on a trade account that has remained dormant for a period of not less than two years, he added.

He urged the owners of the unclaimed money to claim their money by submitting applications through the eGUMIS portal at JANM counters nationwide or by mail to the WTD Putrajaya office.

According to Ahmad, the eGUMIS portal, which was launched in 2020, received about 17.2 mil-

lion visitors as of last month and has almost 4.4 million registered users.

"During the same period, a total of 354,912 online WTD claim applications were received, and of that amount, a total of RM199mil in claim amounts were processed," he said.

He said that JANM is developing the eGUMIS mobile application, which should be ready for use by the end of this year.

Ahmad also said the government intends to amend Act 370, which involves the reduction of the period of transfers of money to the Consolidated Revenue

Account from 15 years to 10 years.

The amendments, he added, also aim to redefine WTD under Sections 8 (a) and 8 (c) of the Act, including the amount of fines imposed on companies or firms for non-compliance.

He said that the law had not been amended in a very long time and that proposed amendments are expected to be tabled in Parliament this year.

WATCH THE VIDEO
TheStarTV.com



11 APRIL 2023 | THURSDAY | PAGE: 4

Ex-Perlis MB slapped with five more charges

By NURBAITI HAMDAN
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KUALA LUMPUR: Former Perlis menteri besar Datuk Seri Azlan Man has been slapped with a further five charges of receiving proceeds from illegal activity amounting to RM1.06mil.

The 64-year-old pleaded not guilty after the charges were read out before Sessions Court judge Azura Alwi.

"I plead not guilty and claim trial," he said here yesterday.

On Monday, Azlan pleaded not guilty at the Kangar Sessions court to five counts of false claims amounting to RM1.18mil between 2013 and 2017.

According to the charges preferred yesterday, Azlan allegedly received proceeds from illegal activity - RM208,339.90; RM196,651.00; RM224,404.40; RM222,811.95 and RM207,468.00 - from Sri Kedawang Travel & Tours (W) Sdn Bhd, Aidil Travel & Tours Sdn Bhd and one Abdul Rahim Halim who represented Aidil Travel.

All of the money were allegedly

received by the accused through three cheques, another cheque that was deposited into two bank accounts belonging to the accused, and cash from Abdul Rahim.

Azlan is accused of committing the offences at Maybank Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, CIMB Bank Putrajaya and Sheraton Imperial Hotel here between Feb 19, 2014 and December, 2017.

He is charged under Section 4(1)(b) of the Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001.

If convicted, Azlan faces a maximum 15 years in jail and a fine of at least five times the amount of gratification or RM5mil, whichever is higher.

Deputy public prosecutor Ahmad Akram Gharib told the court that the offence was non-bailable.

"However, we do not object if the court wishes to exercise its discretion to release the accused on bail and we therefore offer RM50,000 in one surety," DPP



Claiming trial: Azlan being led out of court after the charges were read at the Sessions Court in Kuala Lumpur. - ART CHEN/The Star

Ahmad Akram said.

The DPP also said that Azlan's passport had been surrendered to the Kangar Sessions court on Monday.

The prosecution also informed the court that it would seek to have Azlan's case in Perlis to be

tried together with the Kuala Lumpur case.

Azlan's lawyer Burhanudeen Abdul Wahid agreed with the bail amount offered by the prosecution. Azura then fixed bail at RM50,000 in one surety and fixed June 9 for mention.

14 APRIL 2023 | FRIDAY | PAGE: 1 & 5

Minister's aide nabbed

The MACC has nabbed a senior officer to Human Resources Minister V. Sivakumar and a businessman in its investigation into the hiring of foreign workers. They have been remanded for six days. More ministry officials are expected to be called up for questioning as well.

> See report on page 5 by MAZWIN NIK ANIS, RAHIMY RAHIM and IVAN LOH

HR Minister's aide arrested in probe

Officer investigated over alleged graft to help obtain foreign worker quotas

By MAZWIN NIK ANIS, RAHIMY RAHIM and IVAN LOH
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PUTRAJAYA: An aide to Human Resources Minister V. Sivakumar has been arrested over investigations into a case involving the recruitment of foreign workers.

The senior officer was arrested along with a businessman.

More ministry officials, including a senior officer, are expected to be called up as well to have their statements recorded.

The two suspects, aged between 40 and 50, were picked up at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport at around 1am on Wednesday, upon arrival from Bangkok, Thailand.

The suspects were then brought to the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) headquarters here to record their statements.

According to sources, the busi-

nessman was believed to have acted as a runner and bagman for foreign worker agencies to obtain quotas to bring in these workers.

It is also learnt that graft investigators had gone to the aide's office in the early morning of Wednesday and again yesterday to look for documents and other materials for the purpose of investigation.

The two suspects have been remanded for six days until April 17.

MACC chief commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki confirmed the arrest.

Meanwhile, Sivakumar gave an assurance that he and his ministry would give the authorities their full cooperation.

The Human Resources Minister said that he was well aware of the arrest of one of his officers.

However, since the matter is under MACC investigation, he

said he would not make any more comments on it.

He also urged the media to refrain from making any speculation on the case.

"So, I hope that the media will not speculate or make assumptions that can affect any parties until the probe is completed," he said in a brief statement.

According to a source from the Perak DAP, who declined to be named, the aide who was arrested by the MACC was a former political secretary to Ipoh Barat MP M. Kulasegaran.

"He had worked under Kulasegaran for about two years before being let go," he said.

"We are not even sure if he is still a member of the party," he added.

When contacted, Kulasegaran confirmed that the suspect had once worked under him but declined to comment further.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had previously said that the government was looking for ways to hire migrant workers without the use of agents that imposed high fees.

As of March 14, the Human Resources Ministry had approved an employment quota of 995,396 foreign workers from various sectors.

Meanwhile in Melaka, an ex-political secretary to the former Melaka chief minister Datuk Seri Idris Haron pleaded not guilty to 12 counts of accepting bribes totalling RM408,736 in 2017 and 2018.

On the first count, Datuk Rosli Hasan, 52, was charged with accepting a bribe of RM323,736 in the form of renovation works on the house belonging to his wife in Taman Pokok Mangga between May 2017 and February 2018.

On the 11 other charges, he was alleged to have accepted bribes in

the form of credit card payments, totalling RM85,000, between May and Oct 19, 2017.

The accused was alleged to have accepted the bribes as an inducement to help a company secure a contract to design and build a mosque, multipurpose hall, shoplots and a garbage dump on Lot 341 and 345, Mukim Bachang, worth RM5.28mil, Bernama reported.

The charge, under Section 16(a) (B) of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission Act, carries a maximum jail term of 20 years and a fine of RM10,000 or five times the value of the bribes, whichever is higher, if convicted.

Deputy public prosecutor Irwan Shah Abdul Samad prosecuted while Rosli was represented by Azrul Zulkifli Stork.

Sessions Court judge Elesabet Paya Wan set May 16 for next mention.

17 APRIL 2023 | MONDAY | PAGE: 1 & 2

Sivakumar called by MACC

Human Resources Minister has his statement recorded at MACC headquarters. Last week, three people, including two of his officers, were picked up in connection with a case involving the recruitment of foreign workers.

> See report on page 2

Sivakumar meets MACC

Graft investigators record statement from HR minister

By MAZWIN NIK ANIS and FAZLEENA AZIZ
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PUTRAJAYA: Human Resources Minister V. Sivakumar (pic) has been called by graft investigators to assist investigation into a case in connection with the recruitment of foreign workers, which saw two of his officers being remanded earlier.

It is learnt that Sivakumar arrived at the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) headquarters here at about 10am yesterday.

MACC chief commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki confirmed that the minister was called in for his statement to be recorded.

"Yes, my investigators asked for the minister to come over so that his statement could be recorded," he told *The Star*.

To a question, Azam said he had no details on the progress of the investigation yet.

"I let my investigators do their job first," he added.

One of Sivakumar's officers said the minister spent some 30 minutes at the MACC office.

The minister himself could not be reached for comment.

Last week, three people, including two of his officers, were picked up in connection with the case.

A senior officer of the minister and a businessman, aged between 40 and 50, were arrested as they arrived at Kuala Lumpur International Airport from Bangkok, Thailand.

The senior officer was said to be a former leader in the DAP Socialist Youth (Dapsy) wing.

Follow-up investigations led graft busters to another Sivakumar aide.

This latter suspect, in her 50s, is believed to be holding the post of a private secretary. She was arrested after being called up for her statement to be recorded.

The remand order for the three suspects is expected to end today.

On Saturday, Sivakumar, who is also Batu Gajah MP, said he and his ministry's



officials are willing to cooperate with the authorities in relation to the graft probe involving his officers.

"If I am called, I am willing to present myself and give a statement. So far, the MACC has yet to summon me," he told reporters after an event in conjunction with the Tamil New Year.

He added that the MACC is merely carrying out its duty and responsibilities and, in principle, he supports the implementation of the law based on justice and truth.



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App to reclaim **your monies**

With claimants saying the process is tedious, an app is in the works to help the public get their money back. Tens of thousands of queries have poured in after the announcement that there is about RM11bil in unclaimed money belonging to the people. > See reports on page 4 by FAZLEENA AZIZ

Easier way to reclaim funds

App to be launched for people to trace and get back their monies

By FAZLEENA AZIZ
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PETALING JAYA: In response to the thousands of queries about unclaimed money, a new app will be launched to ease the process for people to trace and reclaim their funds.

Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan said the process to claim the money may be tedious but was vital for security reasons.

Sharing his own experience of being a victim, Ahmad said there were 14 attempts by fraudsters to grab his unclaimed funds.

"Previously, when I was the deputy finance minister during the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), my identity card was made viral because there were many people who were upset with me.

"This created an opportunity for these 'Ahmad Maslan' posers to use my IC information to retrieve my unclaimed money. The money was from a bank account I had opened some seven years previously," he said.

Now, the public has to go through the website (<https://egumis.anm.gov.my/>) to retrieve their unclaimed money.

"We understand that the public

"Rest assured that the unclaimed money is kept safe because it is our responsibility towards public trust."

Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan

want a more seamless experience, hence an app is in the pipeline," he told *The Star* when asked if a different mechanism could be used to credit the unclaimed money into an individual's bank account, similar to how cash aid is channelled to the public from the government.

Ahmad maintained that no agent or any third party could be used to retrieve the money.

Since the announcement that there is about RM11bil in unclaimed money belonging to the public as of March, Ahmad said they had received some 50,000 queries via the website.

"The biggest portion of the unclaimed money is from dormant bank accounts. A lot of the time, people tend to change their addresses and phone numbers, and they become untraceable for the bank to remind them about money in their accounts.

"However, rest assured that the unclaimed money is kept safe because it is our responsibility towards public trust.

"The Accountant General's Department (AGD) officers are nationwide so everyone can have access to information and how to go about it," he added.

In order to create more awareness of the unclaimed money, the AGD will set up booths to answer queries and assist the public.

The AGD, said Ahmad, was also looking to amend the Unclaimed Money Act 1965 (Act 370) with the aim of improving the unclaimed money process, including lowering the period of transfer from the current 15 to 10 years.

Last week, he announced that out of the RM14.1bil received by the AGD from companies or firms in accordance with Section 8 of the Act from 1977 until last month, about RM3.2bil – in savings accounts, insurance and deposits – had been refunded to their owners.

Reasons why money goes into the Registrar of Unclaimed Money

Change of address or phone numbers without notifications

Death of account holder

Family unaware of existing money

Forgetting accounts with low balance or deposited money

Bank mergers or closing of branch



Source: Accountant General's Department (AGD)

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Process of recovering money is tedious, say claimants

PETALING JAYA: Malaysians who tried to retrieve their unclaimed money have expressed their frustrations online, saying that the process is tedious.

Since news of the unclaimed RM11bil announced by Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan on April 12, the public has been trying to get on <https://egumis.anm.gov.my/> but finding it a tough experience.

Norihan Samad, a Facebook user, urged the authorities to simplify the move.

Harmy Sani, who managed to make a claim, said the wait to get a response was too long.

"Once you make a claim, they make you wait a month to get a response, and then they may tell you it (your application) is unsuccessful due to incomplete documents.

"They even asked for a bank draft from the nearest branch. What a farce! Do you think I have time to run around?" he lamented.

Hairis Yaris pointed out there were too many requirements involved.

"This and that requirement ... seemingly making it difficult to apply for the claims.

"How do you find old documents with so much proof of evidence required?"

Muhammad Hanafi Md Sah was stumped by the difficult procedure.

"They are not making it easier, so how do you make a claim? There are billions of ringgit in unclaimed money. Why can't they hire someone like a car repo man who is able to find the owners?

"These people can find anyone, even at the end of the earth," he said.

Siti Nurain Tajudin said she wanted to claim her RM300, but the website was under maintenance until Monday.

"So I went to claim on Tuesday and was surprised to see it was zero. Where did the money go?" she said.

20 APRIL 2023 | THURSDAY | PAGE: 4

CAP: Keep track of your money, assets

PETALING JAYA: Malaysians need to arm themselves with greater financial literacy on important matters such as writing wills, keeping financial records and naming nominees for their savings, experts say.

Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) education officer NV Subbarow said even in making financial claims, many remain quite ignorant of the process.

"They usually just let go of their small balance when they close an account in a particular bank.

"Writing a will is also unpopular among Malaysians because there are not many campaigns for this.

"Even for the Employees Provident Fund (EPF), which sends out annual statements of account, there are those who never claim their money.

"It is time we simplified these processes," he said when asked to comment on the government's recent announcement that there was some RM11bil in unclaimed money.

Subbarow added that a lot of people tend to complain about making claims or requests involving financial matters because they found it tedious.

He suggested that a special department or division be set up and tasked with sending out

reminders to all those with unclaimed money.

The department, he said, should also inform the next of kin about unclaimed funds.

He also said quite a number of people had never nominated anyone for their savings accounts.

"The wives may not even know how much money their husbands have or in which bank the money is kept and the account details. Same goes for the share market," he said.

Economist Datuk Jalilah Baba agreed that Malaysians needed to improve their knowledge of financial matters.

She said most were put off by

the process.

"I have gone through it and it is not as tedious as people make it out to be.

"As far as I am concerned, the requirements of the Accountant General's Department are valid because it needs to make sure the money is returned to the rightful owner.

"This is why we need to understand the procedure," she added.

In Malaysia, there were still people who had not nominated anyone for their EPF savings, got their will done or appointed someone to handle their estate and finances upon their demise, said Jalilah.

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Full audit for Mitra but no witch-hunt, says Ramanan

By FAZLEENA AZIZ
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PUTRAJAYA: The Malaysian Indian Community Transformation Unit (Mitra), which has been mired in controversy with claims that millions had been siphoned out, will undergo a comprehensive audit to clean up its accounts.

The detailed audit will help clear up all past allegations on misappropriation of funds, said newly-appointed Mitra special vehicle committee chairman Datuk Ramanan Ramakrishnan.

"We have to set a specific timeline for the audit. We will look at the details from the audit findings, and make decisions from that point," he said.

However, Ramanan gave an assurance that the move would not be a witch-hunt.

"If there are people found guilty, they will have to face the consequences. We want to move forward and not talk about the past any more.

"If we are busy hunting criminals, it means the main objective to move forward in empowering our community will be ignored.

"The Prime Minister only ordered one thing – that all the people need to be empowered," he said yesterday.

Asked about the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) investigations into Mitra, he said it was best to let the agency handle the matter.

In 2021, Mitra was investigated over allegations of misappropriation of millions of ringgit between 2019 and 2021.

Earlier, Ramanan chaired the committee's first meeting since his appointment to the position by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Mitra was launched by then prime minister Datuk Seri

Najib Razak in 2013 as the Socio-Economic Development Unit of the Indian community before it was disbanded by the Pakatan Harapan government.

It was rebranded as Mitra and placed under the Unity Ministry.

Former prime minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob returned Mitra to the PM's Department following a request by MIC president Tan Sri Vigneswaran in September 2022.

Ramanan said Mitra would now take a new direction, focusing on uplifting the Indian community.

The agency has been given a RM100mil allocation under Budget 2023, of which RM30mil will be in the form of grants to non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

In ensuring transparency in the allocation of funds, Ramanan said applications could only be made via its official website (www.mitra.gov.my) and would be announced publicly.

"So far 448 NGOs from all over the country have applied and we want this process to be transparent with all recipients made known to the people.

"We will be focusing on 10 key areas including women and young entrepreneurs. Applications for grants have also been extended until May 28.

"We will also restructure, expand and revamp Mitra," he said.

All these new efforts will be carried out by the new committee, which has four secretariat members including Dewan Negara senator Datuk C. Sivaratnam, Klang MP V. Ganabathiran, Segamat MP R. Yuneswaran and Mitra director-general Raveendran Nair.

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Lifeline for scam victims?

The National Anti-Financial Crime Centre is looking into ways to stem the effects of scams, including laws that can be used or amended to enable fraud money to be returned to victims. To tackle online scams, the government should consider more preventive measures to stop the fraud, say experts. > See report by MARTIN CARVALHO and GERARD GIMINO on page 2

Toward protecting scam victims

NFCC: Govt re-looking at laws to have fraud money returned to affected persons

PUTRAJAYA: Laws that can be used or amended to enable fraud money to be returned to victims are being looked at by the government in order to stem the effects of online scams on Malaysians, says the National Anti-Financial Crime Centre (NFCC).

Among the provisions being examined are the Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001, Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code, said NFCC director-general Datuk Seri Mustafar Ali.

He said the government intends to strengthen the National Scam Response Centre (NSRC) in terms of operations, manpower resources, centralised data systems, office infrastructure, technical equipment and financial analysis systems.

"Given that the NSRC operations pool the manpower and expertise of various agencies, including banking and telecommunications, an effective integrated enforce-

ment action can be implemented.

"Among actions that can be taken is seizure or restriction of the flow of proceeds of online crime," he said.

"Mule accounts are helping online scams to flourish. Last year alone, more than 25,000 online cheating cases were recorded involving losses of about RM850mil.

"One factor enabling scam syndicates to milk money from victims is the existence of mule accounts 'bought' at RM500 per account from the original account holders for use to transfer the ill-gotten gains," said Mustafar.

"A victim's money that has been defrauded will be put into a mule account and then transferred to several other mule accounts before finally being withdrawn in a short period of time, making it difficult to track," he told Bernama recently.

Account mules are individuals who hand over their ATM card and PIN to others for the purpose of being used in

criminal activities.

Mustafar said the surge in cases was also driven by the use of technology and social media in perpetrating scams as well as the leaking of user information.

Commenting on frauds through social media, he said scammers would contact victims through social media like WhatsApps and Telegram and also impersonate contacts or authorities through Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and other social media applications.

The latest tactic of scammers is to give a link disguised as a bank website or ask the victim to download an application to secure a certain service.

"The victim will next be asked to disclose personal information including banking particulars, allowing the scammer to hack into the victim's account and siphon off the money," he said.

Mustafar said the occurrence of online fraud cases was closely linked to victims'

backgrounds, for example the Macau Scam targets people with large savings while e-commerce fraud involves buyers and sellers.

"Criminals use various tricks to get banking information from victims and the situation becomes even more complicated when the victims are slow to realise that their money has disappeared.

"The losses suffered not only have a negative impact on the national economy but can also spark social problems in general."

He said analysis by enforcement agencies showed that fraud syndicates used phone numbers that were illegally obtained from unscrupulous parties selling consumers' personal information.

According to him, the government has been taking specific measures to combat online crime, including enhancing cooperation with international authorities to ensure further action can be taken against criminals who operate from abroad.

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'Have stronger preventive measures for laws against online scams'

By MARTIN CARVALHO
and GERARD GIMINO
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PETALING JAYA: Amendments to laws tackling online scams, while helping victims, could be more preventive than reactive, say experts.

The government could consider more preventive measures to stop scams from even taking off, said founder and chief executive officer of cybersecurity firm LGMS Berhad, Fong Choong Fook.

"One way would be for the allocation of mobile numbers to be associated with a real identity. The problem now is that scammers can easily get these numbers.

"If the government emphasises locking down numbers to a certain identity, it will

not be that 'easy for scammers to use mobile phones to perform scams," he said, adding that China required all phone numbers to be registered with a valid identity.

Fong said that stricter laws were needed to penalise criminals.

"Scams involve individuals at several layers, with some behind the scenes as well as those borrowing accounts as mule accounts.

"The current penalties may be insufficient to deter people from lending out their accounts (as mules) without knowing the consequences," he said.

He said the government should also look at another mechanism for the public to report cases of suspected mule accounts.

"This will not be easy as it requires close coordination. Banks themselves have to

find an effective way to monitor account holders' activities and detect mule accounts," he said.

Mule accounts, he said, could possibly be detected by authorities, noting how they can be seen through unusual financial transactions.

"Let's say someone is receiving inbound transactions of RM5,000 every few minutes. This should raise suspicions," he said.

Universiti Sains Malaysia cybersecurity expert Assoc Prof Dr Selvakumar Manickam said that preventive measures should be taken to further mitigate scam cases.

"This is definitely one of the steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of scams."

"On the other hand, the government also has to look at proactive measures to prevent such crimes," he said.

Telecommunication providers, he said, also had a bigger role to play in mitigating fraud cases by blocking numbers that were found to be linked to fraud transactions.

Bank authorities should also pay attention to suspicious transactions, Selvakumar said, adding that they should call the account holder to confirm whether the transaction was genuine.

Anti-crime activist Dave Avran said that while reexamining the relevant law is good, getting victims' money back may be difficult in reality.

"The money (cash) that is cheated from victims is very quickly used up. The logic here is 'easy come, easy go'. So, while it is good to look at amending relevant laws, I don't think money that has been stolen from victims can be returned so easily."

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File and pay taxes, gig workers told

Tax adviser: Failure to do so will see income earners face stiff penalties

By BENJAMIN LEE
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PETALING JAYA: As the tax submission deadline approaches, the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) is calling on gig workers to file their taxes.

ACCA ExpertLink panel member for taxation Thenesh Kannaa said it was important that gig workers did so before the deadline.

"It is the civic responsibility of all income earners, including gig workers, regardless of age, to file and pay taxes to ensure the fiscal sustainability of the government."

"The government will then be able to provide infrastructure and services such as telecommunication and roads which are commonly used by gig workers," he said yesterday.

A 2020 study by independent think tank Emir Research showed that about four million Malaysians, or about 26% of the workforce, were engaged in the gig economy.

A gig worker is defined as "a person who does temporary or

"It is the civic responsibility of all income earners, including gig workers, regardless of age, to file and pay taxes ..."

Thenesh Kannaa

freelance work, especially an independent contractor engaged in an informal or on-demand basis".

Thenesh said failure to pay taxes could also cause gig workers to face severe financial and even civil issues down the road.

"Penalties for failing to file or pay taxes can be as high as 100% of unpaid taxes which will only get worse the longer gig workers ignore filing and paying taxes."

"Failure to file and pay taxes also heavily affects a person's credit scores, making it harder for them to get loans at reasonable interest rates."

"This especially hurts a gig

worker's potential to advance in life whether it be getting a loan to buy a new home or starting their own business, thus limiting their ability to change jobs or start a family in the future," he said.

He said trying to avoid filing taxes had become near impossible due to increased digitalisation of modern gig work and payment methods which leaves digital footprints that are easily traced by the Inland Revenue Board (LHDN).

Thenesh, who is a partner of tax advisory firm TraTax, gave some pointers on how gig workers could begin filing their taxes.

"Gig workers can easily get

their Tax Identification Number (TIN) online through the LHDN website or mobile app, which they can then use to file their taxes digitally, without ever needing to physically go to a LHDN office.

"If tax filing is too difficult, hiring a licensed tax agent to help file your taxes is also an option. To discern the legitimacy of an agent, taxpayers are advised to cross-check the agent's name with the LHDN tax agent quick search function on the Finance Ministry's MyCukai website."

"It is also important to know that agents would never ask or need access to their client's online tax accounts, as agents will always help file their client's taxes under their own certified platform."

"Additionally, they can also get help for free by visiting the nearest LHDN branch, bringing all their receipts and other records of income and business-related expenses," he said.

For gig workers filing taxes for the first time, Thenesh said there were ways to hasten the process.

"Firstly, use a spreadsheet to record and organise both your income and expenses so that it's easier to identify how much you are making and how much income there is to declare."

"Secondly, be diligent in keeping records of all your expenses as this will make it easier for you to apply for tax deductions or claims."

"Thirdly, understand what counts as capital allowances that are used for your gig work like a new oven for a home-baking business, as they may be applicable for tax depreciation/capital allowances claims."

"Lastly, always keep up to date with the list of items that are subject to personal tax relief deductions on LHDN's website to ensure you are getting the maximum tax savings possible," he said.

The current deadline for manual tax filing is on April 30 and May 15 for e-filing.

However, if one's gig income qualifies as a business income, the deadline is June 30 (manual filing) and July 15 (e-filing).

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Dentist loses RM220,000 to scammers

By NELSON BENJAMIN
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JOHOR BARU: It is a sombre Hari Raya for a dentist who fell for a scam and lost more than RM220,000 – most of which he had borrowed.

The modus operandi was all so predictable – a caller alleged that he was involved in insurance fraud and money laundering.

It is learnt that the dentist, in his 40s, worried about being shamed, took out loans and borrowed from friends and relatives to raise the amount.

Sources said the dentist received a call several days ago from a “medical staff member” who alleged that he had made a fake insurance claim with a local private hospital.

When the dentist denied it, the next step of the scam kicked in – the call was transferred to a “policeman” at the district police headquarters who threatened to arrest him.

“The victim was reminded that the festive season was approaching and it would be embarrassing if he was put in the lock-up,” a source said.

The dentist was told to open a new bank account and move all his money there while police investigated his other accounts.

The dentist did as instructed, and transferred about RM220,000 kept in different accounts to the new account. Most of the funds were loans.

He was later directed to reveal his new bank account details.

The sources said the dentist only

realised that he had been conned when the scammers continued to demand for more money.

By the time the dentist came to his senses, almost all his savings had been wiped clean from the new account. He then lodged a police report.

Scammers also got the upper hand in another case involving a student, who was baited with free mobile calls and cash vouchers totalling RM1,000 – only to lose RM120,000, which included her father's money.

Sources said the scam occurred several days ago when the student, in her 20s, got a call from someone supposedly from a telecommunications company.

The caller told the victim that she had been selected and would not need to pay her bills for several months.

“They promised her vouchers totalling RM1,000 to be credited into her account. They asked her to fill up an online form detailing her bank account and bank card details and also her father's bank details as a guarantor,” a source said.

It is learnt that within hours, large sums of money was withdrawn from both accounts totalling RM120,000. The victim then lodged a police report.

A police officer confirmed both cases and said investigations were under way under Section 420 of the Penal Code for cheating.

He urged the public to be mindful about giving their bank details to strangers and to contact the police hotline at 07-221 2999 for assistance.

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MACC takes anti-corruption fight to the ground

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has implemented targeted programmes involving government procurement, public funds or government allocations, and enforcement sectors throughout this year to prevent corrupt practices.

The programmes, said MACC community education division (PenMas) director Datuk Razim Mohd Noor, focused on issues such as cartels, leakage of government funds, violations of the law and inefficiencies in government revenue collection.

"As at April this year, 33 programmes with enforcement agencies have been held nationwide. A

total of 74 programmes were also carried out with ministries and government agencies that are at risk and had received large allocations under Budget 2023," he told Bernama recently.

Among the programmes is the MACC dialogue with the Public Works Department, which was held to ensure it continues practising good governance in project management.

At the same time, MACC, said Razim, took the initiative to spread the anti-corruption message through formal and informal education in public and private tertiary institutions as well as at primary and secondary schools in collaboration with the Education

and Higher Education Ministries.

"Among these is the implementation of an elective Integrity and Anti-Corruption Course Module offered by all public and private tertiary institutions as well as a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) course for students taking certificate and diploma courses," he said.

MACC, he said, was also targeting primary and secondary school students through its Wira Anti-Corruption (WAR) programme and themed competitions.

"At the higher education level, it includes clubs such as the Anti-Corruption Student Force (Amar), the MACC Chief Commissioner's Cup IPT Debate competition, the

Anti-Corruption Student Convention, the Amar Convention, and a series of dialogues between students and MACC officers."

Razim said that at the community level, the anti-corruption message was delivered through programmes with a focus on certain target groups.

"For example, if it is a government agency, it targets civil servants, and if it is a socio-cultural branch, it targets the community and influential leaders in the community," he said.

On the public's perception and effectiveness of MACC's programmes, Razim said 92.9% of the 6,471 respondents, comprising

civil servants, students, private sector workers, members of the public and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), gave very positive feedback.

Of the respondents, 57.1% were civil servants; students (24.7%); private sector workers (11.9%); the general public (4.3%); and NGOs (1.9%).

MACC, he added, would also be introducing a Malaysiati Corruption Survey in collaboration with the Statistics Department.

Razim said the survey would involve help from experts as well as technical assistance from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes and academics from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

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Rapper Michel convicted for aiding Jho Low



No emotion: Michel (second from left) leaving the US federal court after being convicted in Washington. — Reuters

Ex-Fugees singer facing 20 years in jail

WASHINGTON: Pras Michel, a Grammy-winning rapper-turned-political influencer, was convicted of conspiring to wage a back-channel lobbying campaign to end US probes into Malaysian Jho Low and get American authorities to extradite a dissident Chinese billionaire.

Federal jurors on Wednesday convicted Michel, 50, of other crimes, including conspiring to illegally funnel Low's money into the 2012 campaign of President Barack Obama. Michel gambled by testifying in his own defence during the month-long trial in Washington, denying wrongdoing.

Michel showed no emotion as the foreperson declared him "guilty" on all 10 counts, and he faces as many as 20 years in prison on the most serious charge.

The verdict in Washington was a stark downfall for Michel, who rose to fame in the 1990s with the Fugees, one of the best-selling hip-hop groups ever.

Prosecutors said Low paid more than US\$100m to Michel in two plots. His conspirators lobbied President Donald Trump's administration in 2017 to end US probes of Low's alleged embezzlement of billions of dollars from the Malaysian Development Fund, 1MDB. They also pushed to have Guo Wengui sent back to China from the US. Both efforts failed.

"Michel was greedy," prosecutor Sean Malrynne argued to jurors on April 20. "In exchange for Low's millions, Michel agreed to do Low's bidding over six, seven years." Outside the courthouse, Michel's attorney, David Kenner, said he will "certainly appeal" the verdict.

US District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly set no sentencing date, giving Michel until June 9 to contest the results of the trial.

Prosecutors said Pras began doing Low's bidding in 2012, when Low wanted a photo with Obama.

Low allegedly sent US\$21m through shell companies to Michel. The rapper funnelled US\$2m through straw donors into Obama's campaign and a super political action committee, Black Men Vote. Michel kept the balance, the US said.

Low was excluded from two Obama fundraisers because of the campaign's concerns about his playboy image, but the tycoon got his photo with the president and his wife at a holiday party. US election law bars donations from foreign nationals and the reimbursement of straw donors.

Hollywood actor Leonardo DiCaprio added a bit of celebrity pizzazz to the proceedings. He testified he partied with Low, who told him he wanted to give US\$20m

to US\$30m to the Democratic Party in 2012. Low also put US\$100m into the movie *The Wolf Of Wall Street*, which starred DiCaprio.

In 2017, Michel worked with others to try to squelch a US civil forfeiture lawsuit against Low and encourage Guo's removal from the US, prosecutors said. For that, Low sent US\$100m to Michel, who gave some to his confederates, prosecutors said.

The plotters included former Trump fundraiser Elliott Broidy, former Justice Department attorney George Higginbotham, who moonlighted as Michel's lawyer; and Nickie Lum Davis, a Hawaiian businessman. All three pleaded guilty, but Trump pardoned Broidy, Higginbotham and Broidy testified as government witnesses.

Jurors heard that Michel and others met with Low in Thailand and China about lobbying to get the 1MDB case dropped. They also heard that Michel met in China and New York with Sun Lijun, the Chinese vice minister of public security, who was pushing for Guo's extradition.

Michel was convicted of conspiracy to violate the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) over his efforts to help Low, conspiring to act as an unregistered foreign agent of China and to commit money laundering, acting as an unregistered agent of Low; and acting as an agent of China in pushing for Guo's removal.

In his testimony, Michel denied conspiring with Low to funnel the tycoon's money into Obama's campaign. He said Low was willing to pay US\$20m for a photo.

He also denied he acted as an agent of China or knew he had to register with the US under FARA.

Jurors also convicted Michel of conspiring to make false statements to banks, including City National Bank, Morgan Stanley, and Citigroup Inc, about the source and purpose of funds he got from Low. He was also convicted of witness tampering.

Low was charged with Michel in Washington federal court, and he was indicted separately in the Eastern District of New York, where he's accused of conspiring to launder billions of dollars in illegal proceeds and paying hundreds of millions of dollars in bribes.

In that case, the US alleges Low stole US\$1.42bn from three bond transactions that Goldman Sachs Group Inc arranged.

In March, Guo was indicted in New York, where he's accused in a US\$1bn fraud case. He was an associate of Steve Bannon, the former White House strategist for Trump. — Bloomberg