

To receive Daily news juice pdf on your WhatsApp, Send Your NAME and STATE through WhatsApp on 75979-00000.

1. Cybercrimes in trend: How criminals based in southeast Asia are trapping Indians online

Why in News?

A large number of Indians are falling prey to financial fraud carried out over the Internet, allegedly by criminals based in three contiguous southeast Asian countries: Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia.

In its analysis of trends seen from January to April, the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) found that 46% of such frauds reported in this period — in which the victims cumulatively lost an estimated Rs 1,776 crore — originated in these three countries.

About I4C

The I4C works under the Union Home Ministry "to create an effective framework and ecosystem for the prevention, detection, investigation, and prosecution of cybercrime in the country".

Crime Data

National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP) data show 7.4 lakh complaints were made between January 1 and April 30 this year, while 15.56 lakh complaints were received in all of 2023.

A total 9.66 lakh, 4.52 lakh, 2.57 lakh, and 26,049 complaints were received in 2022, 2021, 2020, and 2019 respectively.

Types of cybercrime

The I4C has identified four broad categories of fraud originating from these three countries, following certain modus operandi.

Trading scam: The alleged fraudsters issued ads on social media offering free trading tips, often using pictures of well-known stock market experts and fake news articles. The victims were asked to join a WhatsApp group or Telegram channel, where they would receive "tips" on making money by investing in shares.



After a few days, the victims would be asked to install some specific trading applications and register themselves in order to receive further guidance on making "huge" profits. The victims would start "investing" on the apps, following recommendations made by the cybercriminals. None of these apps would be

registered with the stock market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), but the victims typically neglected to check this.

The victims deposited money in particular bank accounts to “buy shares”, and were shown some fake profits in their digital wallets. But when they tried to withdraw this “money”, they were shown a message that they could do so only after they had accumulated a certain amount, say Rs 30-50 lakh, in their wallet. This meant the victim had to keep “investing” and, sometimes, had to also pay “taxes” on the “profits” they were purportedly earning.

Digital arrest: Potential victims would get a call in which the caller would tell them that the victims had sent or were the intended recipients of a parcel containing illegal goods, drugs, fake passports, or other contraband.

In some cases, relatives or friends of the target would be told that the target had been found to be involved in a crime.



Once they had the target — who would be chosen carefully — in their net, the criminals would contact them over Skype or another video calling platform. They would pose as law enforcement officials, often wearing uniforms and calling from places resembling police stations or government offices, and demand money for a “compromise” and “closure of the case”.

In certain cases, the victims were “digitally arrested”, which meant they were forced to stay visible to the criminals until their demands had been met.

Investment scam (task-based): Victims typically received a WhatsApp message from an overseas number, purportedly belonging to a representative of a company, with an offer to earn a large sum of money, say, Rs 30,000, while working from home.

Those who responded were told they would have to help boost the social media ratings of some entities by giving them a five-star rating. After the “task” was completed, victims received a “code”, which they were asked to share with their “admin” on Telegram.

The “admin” would ask the victims where they wanted to receive their money and, after a few five-star rating “tasks” on YouTube or Google reviews etc. were completed, would deposit a small sum, perhaps Rs 500.

At this point, the victim would be asked to participate in a “pre-paid” or “merchant” task, in which a higher return would be promised after a certain amount — which could be between Rs 1,500 and Rs 1 lakh — had been deposited. Victims who refused were blocked, but those who chose to participate were told the money and profit would come to them in a day.

However, the following day, the victims would be told that their "performance score" was not good enough, and they needed to improve it by participating in new tasks so they could get their money.

Romance/dating scam: This was a somewhat more conventional trap, though laid online. The victims, who were male, were lured by people they thought were foreign women. These "women" would propose relationships or marriage, and then make plans to come and meet in person. However, the victim would typically get a call from the "woman" that she had been detained at the airport, and needed money to get out.

On its website, the US FBI, which has dealt with such cases, says romance scamsters are experts at appearing genuine, caring, and believable. These con artists lurk on most dating and social media sites, and seek to quickly gain the victim's trust.

Why Southeast Asia

I4C zeroed in on Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia after analysing data on its National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP), inputs received from states and Union Territories, and some open-source information.

The I4C has found that many web applications used in the crime had Mandarin characters. Thus, Chinese connection cannot be ruled out.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

2. The cultivation of paddy varieties like PUSA-44, which takes longer to grow and requires more water, has been discouraged in Punjab. Why are farmers in several districts unwilling to stop their cultivation?

Why in News?

Punjab's paddy farmers have started sowing seeds for this year's kharif season, even as the high-yield, long-duration growth variety PUSA-44 has been banned in the state since last year. Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann also claimed recently that the government managed to decrease area under PUSA-44 cultivation in 2023 as compared to 2022. This reportedly saved 5 billion cusecs of water, given its higher irrigation needs, and Rs. 477 crores through reduced power consumption.



However, preventing farmers from sowing PUSA-44 and two other non-recommended long-duration varieties could prove quite challenging in many districts.

First, why did Punjab ban PUSA-44?

In October 2023, the Punjab government banned PUSA-44. Cultivation of other varieties, such as Peeli PUSA and Dogar PUSA, has also been discouraged as they take between 158 to 162 days to grow, from sowing nursery to harvesting.

The longer duration means five to six extra cycles of irrigation, all while Punjab faces severe groundwater depletion. Moreover, this variety is also known to exacerbate the issue of stubble burning in the state. The straw stubble or residue of the rice crop planted in the kharif season (from July to October) is left in the fields as the winter crops (for the rabi season from November to March) are set to be planted.

To clear their fields in time for planting the next season's crops, farmers burn the stubble. This, along with wind movements and other factors, contributes greatly to winter pollution in northern India.

Why are farmers reluctant to stop cultivation of these varieties?

What makes the three varieties attractive to farmers is their higher yield of around 32 to 36 quintals per acre, against 30 to 31 quintals of the regular varieties. Farmers also get Minimum Support Price, or a guaranteed minimum price from the government, for selling paddy. Simply, higher yield equals higher incomes.

How effective can the ban be?

Barnala-based farmer Sham Singh said, "Even if the government bans the sale of PUSA-44 seeds, it wouldn't significantly impact farmers because every farmer who sows them keeps the seeds for the next season, and many seed multiplying stores have already sold the seeds to interested farmers." He said the decision on continuing the cultivation ultimately lies with the farmer.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

3. Recent violations fire safety regulating leading to mass deaths

Why in News?

A deadly fire at a gaming centre in Rajkot, Gujarat on May 25 killed at least 32 people, bringing focus back on the safety of public buildings and venues. The TRP Game Zone carnage unfolded in the evening, as fire spread inside the structure built with a metal frame and sheets, trapping the victims including several children. Two inquiries have been set up to go into the disaster, one a Special Investigation Team (SIT) by the State government and another by the Rajkot police.



The Gujarat High Court suo motu took up the incident and made critical observations on the functioning of the State administration, following which the Police Commissioner, Raju Bhargava, Additional Commissioner Vidhi Choudhary, and Municipal Commissioner Anand Patel were transferred. Rajkot municipal officials including town planning officers responsible for the prevention of illegal

constructions were suspended, and four people including the operator of the game zone, Dhaval Thakkar, were arrested.

What was the other incident?

On May 25, seven babies died in a fire in a hospital for newborns in Vivek Vihar, Delhi, leading to the arrest of Naveen Khichi, owner of the New Born Baby Care Hospital, along with the doctor on duty. Preliminary reports suggested that a large number of oxygen cylinders stored in the facility aggravated the impact of the blaze. In both incidents, the focus is on fire certification by the authorities, issue of No Objection Certificates (NOC), and the failure of authorities to take cognisance of illegalities that were happening in full public view.



What fire regulations govern safety?

The Union of India's position on fire safety is that the Model Building Bye-Laws, 2016 and its component Chapter 11 on "Fire Protection and Fire Safety Requirements" provides the necessary framework for State governments, which bear responsibility for fire safety under law. Ensuring adherence to fire safety norms and standards laid down in

Part 4 of the National Building Code (NBC) and incorporating mandatory provisions in the process is left to the States.

In the case of the Rajkot game zone, it was built apparently as a non-standard structure to evade regulatory requirements, and the inquiry would reveal whether it was qualified to be used as an assembly building offering leisure and entertainment services.

How have the courts viewed neglect of fire safety?

Among the most high-profile deadly fire accidents that have led to the loss of life, the Uphaar cinema tragedy of 1997 in Delhi resulted in the conviction of the owners of the venue, Sushil Ansal and Gopal Ansal among others for negligence and tampering of evidence. The death of 59 people who were trapped in the balcony of the hall because of illegally installed seats and a blocked exit resulted in a protracted legal battle, with the families of the victims forming an association to seek justice. The Uphaar case was prosecuted with the charge of causing death by negligence (IPC 304A), hurt or grievous hurt by rash or negligent act (337, 338) by the owners of the cinema, and culpable homicide (304) and other sections in the case of theatre staff and public agency employees, such as the electricity authority. A transformer of the electricity authority that was placed without sanction and allowed without safeguards was thought to have triggered the inferno. The owners had to directly bear responsibility for the wilful structural deviations.

Essentially, the court held the owners of the property, employees and staff from the electricity agency liable for the devastating toll in the Uphaar tragedy for violating the law and later for payment of compensation. On June 13 last year, the anniversary of the blaze, the Association of Victims of Uphaar Tragedy blamed the judiciary for allowing the Ansal brothers to walk out of jail on a reduced sentence.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance
Source: The Hindu

PrepMate