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Don't let power thieves profit

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Watt a crime

Illegal mining of cryptocurrency has led to a 300% jump in electricity thefts over the past few years with most of the criminals operating from shoplots and even homes. This has prompted a message from Bukit Aman – know your tenants and neighbours.

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Bukit Aman: Illegal crypto mining syndicates make bulk of TNB's RM520mil losses

KUALA LUMPUR: About half a billion ringgit has been lost to electricity theft over the last four years, with the bulk of it from illegal crypto mining.

Based on statistics provided by Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB), Bukit Aman said there was substantial losses due to illegal cryptocurrency mining which requires a huge amount of computing power.

"Overall, TNB lost about RM520mil to electricity thefts. Most of the cases involved illegal crypto mining operations," said Bukit Aman Criminal Investigation Department (CID) director Comm Datuk Seri Mohd Shuhaily Mohd Zain (pic).

Five years ago, TNB lost RM9.2mil to power thieves, followed by RM140.6mil in 2021, RM124.9mil (2022), RM67.1mil (2023) and RM138.7mil last year.

As of last month, it registered a RM40.1mil loss.

Comm Mohd Shuhaily told *The Star* that crypto mining syndicates tend to operate from rented shop lots, warehouses or even residential homes.

He said these criminals would often pick areas where foot traffic was low.

To ensure continuity of their operations, he said the syndicates

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Comm Datuk Seri Mohd Shuhaily Mohd Zain



would run high-powered mining machines 24 hours a day, which generate intense heat and noise.

"Many syndicates would then install heavy duty ventilation systems, air conditioners and soundproofing materials to avoid drawing attention from the neighbours or enforcement authorities."

As for the power consumption, he said a common tactic used by syndicate members was to illegally bypass the electricity meter by tapping directly into the main power distribution board.

"This allows them to consume massive amounts of electricity – often equivalent to what an entire residential block would use."

"Some syndicates also employ

technicians and electrical experts to ensure the illegal wiring is done.

"In more sophisticated setups, surveillance cameras and entry-control mechanisms are installed. And only their insiders are given access to the site," Comm Mohd Shuhaily said.

These syndicates, he said, were often on the move to avoid detection.

"They would shift their operations every few months to new premises," he said.

Rental agreements are typically made under false identities or using third-party intermediaries, making it harder to trace the individuals behind the activity, he added.

Comm Mohd Shuhaily said the public should be alert to signs of suspicious activities in their neighbourhoods.

"Common indicators include buildings with heavy-duty ventilation systems operating non-stop, unusual humming or whirring sounds similar to industrial fans, or properties that appear unoccupied or underused but consistently have lights or cooling systems running at odd hours."

"In some cases, residents may notice frequent electrical work."

"If you come across such signs or suspect illegal electricity use, do not approach the site. Instead, report it to the nearest police station or contact TNB's hotline."

"Your information, no matter how small it may seem, could be crucial in uncovering illegal operations," he said, adding that these reports would be confidential.

Comm Mohd Shuhaily said there was intensified joint enforcement operations code-named Ops Letrik in 2023 spearheaded by the CID's Intelligence, Operation and Records Division (D4).

The division, led by principal assistant director Senior Asst

Comm Noor Dellhan Yahaya, had focussed on illegal crypto-mining activities.

"There is also intelligence gathering, increased cooperation with local councils and TNB, and improved public awareness."

"Additionally, advancements in TNB's detection technology made it easier to identify and isolate suspicious consumption patterns," he said.

Since 2020, he said 2,488 raids had been conducted under Ops Letrik nationwide.

"We also seized 95,163 crypto-mining machines," he said.

Comm Mohd Shuhaily said that 918 people had been detained following the raids.

Besides electricity theft caused by illegal crypto mining, he said other culprits included illegal factories and commercial premises which tampered with electricity meters.

He said electricity thefts compromise the integrity and safety of the national power grid.

"Moreover, the illegal nature of these setups often makes enforcement and prosecution more challenging, as the premises may be vacated or operations shifted before authorities can act," he said.