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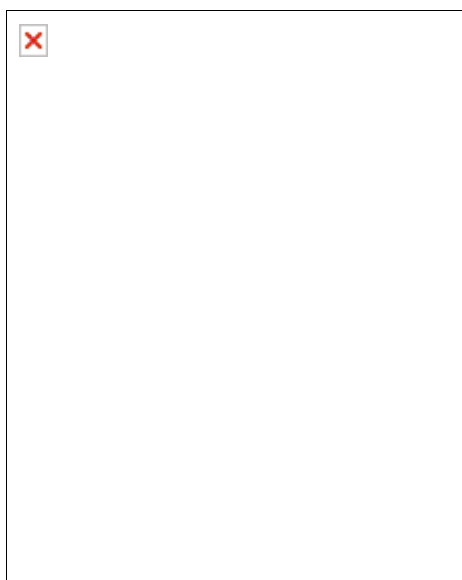
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ARRAIGNMENT OF FIVE MEN IN CREDIT CARD RACKET:

Exposé of LTTE's new Mafia cloak

By Manjula FERNANDO

The recent arrests of five men of Malaysian and Sri Lankan origin in Australia, in connection with a sophisticated international credit card skimming racket, could be an expose of the LTTE's transformation into a global mafia and its continuing global criminal activities.



Although the details are yet to be revealed of the 'nerve cell' from where these arrested men - all Tamils as far as the locked up Lankans are concerned - were being string-puppeted, the group have had their network operations in places where the LTTE concentration is disturbingly high, Canada, Britain and the western Europe.

The global fraud scheme involved credit card numbers stolen in Britain being emailed to Australia and encoded onto blank 'Coles Myer' and 'Crown cards', which were then used to withdraw cash at Automated Teller Machines (ATMs), the Australian media reported.

These men have also stolen credit card information of Australian citizens and transmitted details overseas to their other wings and criminal cells.

Of the five men, three were key members of the Australian wing of the global syndicate.

Their arrests last Sunday is reported to be a massive blow to the operations of the criminal wing.

The Sydney police took into custody two more individuals aged 22 and 28 on Wednesday in connection with the skimming racket, bringing the total number arrested so far to 27.

During the trial of the three men, the court heard more than 1,500 credit and debit card details were stolen in the scheme to fleece major banks. These three are said to be masterminds of the scam which the police identified as one of the largest credit card skimming rackets in Australia. They have lived on refugee status.

One of the arrested had installed a skimming device in his Strathfield grocery store. Police has also described a Sri Lankan man arrested that day as an "international organiser" for the syndicate, and a Canadian national as a "technician".

The masterminds, Karan Nada, 42, of Endeavour Hills, Ramesh Rasanayagam, 32, of Hallam, and Udayakumar Vivekanandan, 32, all pleaded guilty. All three were handed jail terms but the jail terms of Rasanayagam and Vivekanandan were suspended by the Judge.

According to Herald Sun, 'Judge Roy Punshon said he was guarded about Nada's prospects of rehabilitation given he had committed similar offences before. A card skimmer was found at his house in 2006.

He jailed Nada for 16 months and ordered that he serve at least 10 months.

The judge said Rasanayagam, a father of two and now a permanent resident, suffered post traumatic stress after being kidnapped in Sri Lanka and was entitled to a discount for co-operating with police. He was given a suspended 18-month jail term.

Vivekanandan's immigration status was suspended pending the outcome of the fraud case. But Judge Punshon said he was entitled to mercy and suspended his 12-month jail term.

Some of the arrested Sri Lankans complaints to court of harassment before their flight to Australia could imply that they had been members of the LTTE in Sri Lanka.

The investigators found that the group had withdrawn \$40,000, made up 317 fake cards and tried to steal another \$70,000 across Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and the ACT in 2008.

Three homes were raided across Pendle Hill, Strathfield and Auburn where police seized Eftpos terminals, laptops, mobile phones, and PIN copying technology. Cash, falsified travel documents and Canadian credit cards were also seized. The material seized also included 18,000 blank and counterfeit credit cards.

Leading international counter terror expert Prof. Rohan Gunaratna in an interview with the Sunday Observer last month said the LTTE's main source of income is human smuggling but their international criminal activities include bank, credit card and cheque fraud since contributions from sympathetic Tamil diaspora had dwindled after the conflict ended in May 2009.

"The LTTE needs funds to pay rent for its offices, travel for its activists, maintain their families and hire lawyers, lobbyists, former politicians, former diplomats and others that advance their aims and objectives. The LTTE superstructure overseas that supported the LTTE in Sri Lanka is determined to continue the fight by other means. The tools they use include constituency

(electorate) pressure, financial inducements, dissemination of disinformation and misinformation and lobbying and campaigning Western politicians, officials, journalists and human rights activists.”

He said without money and other assets, the LTTE will cease to exist.

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