

Cane scammers, govt urged

Experts call for Singapore-style punishments, tougher laws

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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia should consider harsher punishments, including caning like Singapore's recent law, to curb misuse of bank accounts and disrupt scam networks, say experts.

However, they said stricter penalties must also be paired with stronger financial controls, institutional accountability and cross-border enforcement to curb fraud effectively.

Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) president Mohideen Abdul Kader urged Malaysia to consider emulating Singapore's move to impose caning on scammers, arguing that even if the immediate impact is felt mainly by low-level money mules, the deterrent effect is significant.

"Imposing corporal punishment on mules would discourage individuals from allowing their banking facilities to be used for any purpose other than their own. It is crucial for the public to understand that a bank account is strictly for personal use, and that any abuse cannot be tolerated," he said.

Mohideen said a single mule account can be linked to a large number of scam victims, and overseas syndicates would find it far more difficult to operate across borders without access to local accounts through which funds can be transferred.

Singapore has passed amendments to its criminal law imposing mandatory caning for scammers and discretionary caning for mules involved in scams.

The move aims to strengthen penalties against the nation's most prevalent type of crime.

Addressing concerns about disproportionate punishment, Mohideen said the objective of harsher penalties is not necessarily to reach overseas masterminds directly but to weaken the local ecosystem that enables scams to function.

"Even if the immediate impact

falls on low-level actors, the cumulative effect is to reduce the pool of available local channels for fund transfers, making it significantly harder for overseas syndicates to operate," he said, adding that the law must clearly distinguish between deliberate enablers and vulnerable or coerced individuals to avoid miscarriages of justice.

Bukit Aman Commercial Crime Investigation Department (CCID) director Comm Datuk Rusdi Mohd Isa said he fully supports imposing harsher punishments on scammers, similar to those used in Singapore.

"The government is expected to introduce the Cybercrime Bill this year. It is timely as the Computer Crimes Act 1997 has not been amended since its enforcement.

"We are eagerly waiting for tougher punishments to be introduced to curb misuse of bank accounts and disrupt scam networks," he said when contacted.

With Singapore introducing caning as one of the penalties against scammers, Comm Rusdi said Malaysia should also consider harsher punishments for scammers.

"Ultimately, laws must be up to date, in line with the change in times. Our ultimate goal should be to curb scams effectively," he added.

Financial forensics expert Raymon Ram, meanwhile, said mandatory caning is designed primarily as a deterrent.

"Singapore's decision to introduce caning for scam-related offences was intended to send a strong signal that such crimes carry serious consequences, similar to how mandatory caning previously reduced loan shark harassment cases," he said.

Ram said such harsher penalties may deter some opportunistic participation, but on their own, do not materially disrupt the business model of scam syndicates.

He said scam syndicates are designed to absorb losses at the mule level, with low-level actors easily replaced while leadership

Scam penalties vs scam losses: Selected Malaysian court cases	
Date reported: July 2, 2025	Date reported: July 2, 2025
Case details: 10 charges of cheating Social Security Organisation (Socso) for non-existent training courses	Case details: IT executive accused of cheating in a luxury watch deal involving three Rolex timepieces
Amount allegedly scammed: RM496,000	Amount allegedly scammed: RM146,657
Fine imposed: RM300,000 or in default 10 months' jail	Fine imposed: RM20,000 or in default 12 months' jail
Charged under: Section 417 of the Penal Code	Charged under: Section 417 of the Penal Code
Date reported: Nov 15, 2025	Date reported: May 7, 2025
Case details: 36-year-old man charged for using a forged payment receipt to obtain an iPhone	Case details: Eight charges for defrauding five investors through fictitious investments
Amount allegedly scammed: RM4,500	Amount allegedly scammed: RM3.159mil
Fine imposed: RM4,500 or six months' jail	Fine imposed: RM1mil and jail term not exceeding 10 years
Charged under: Section 471 of the Penal Code	Charged under: Section 179(b) of the Capital Markets and Services Act 2007

Source: Various news reports

TheStar graphics

and financial controllers remain insulated overseas.

"Arresting and punishing local mules addresses the visible end of the crime but leaves the command structure and money flows intact," he said.

Ram said the most effective deterrent is rapid financial disruption, including fast fund-freezing powers, stronger accountability for banks and telcos, and coordinated cross-border enforcement.

"When criminals believe stolen funds will be frozen quickly, accounts shut down and leaders arrested across borders, scams become harder, riskier and far less profitable," he said.

Bar Council member New Sin Yew echoed the need for a broader response, noting that scam crimes are increasingly complex

and technologically driven.

"Scammers today are using artificial intelligence, deepfakes and highly sophisticated tactics. This is a multifactorial and evolving problem, and increasing punishment alone is insufficient," he said.

Yew said tackling scams requires a holistic approach involving law enforcement, financial institutions, payment gateways, technology companies, social media platforms, telcos and internet service providers, and public education.

He also highlighted the cross-border nature of scams, where funds are often moved overseas to evade domestic enforcement.

"Increased international cooperation is essential, even though it is challenging. Stronger penalties may have a role but they cannot on their own solve a problem that is transnational and technology-

How Singapore is toughening penalties for scam offences

Singapore amended its Criminal Law (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill on Nov 4, 2025, introducing mandatory caning for scam-related offences.

Key provisions

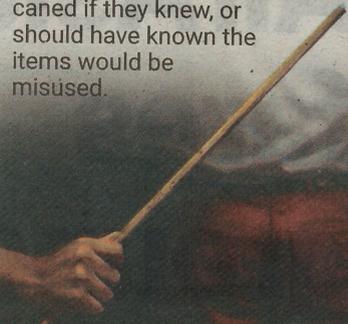
Mandatory caning for scammers: Scammers and members of scam syndicates face mandatory caning of between six and 24 strokes.

Discretionary caning for mules

Intermediaries or "mules" in scam operations may face discretionary caning of up to 12 strokes.

Penalties for providing scam tools

Those who supply SIM cards, Singpass credentials or payment accounts to scammers may be caned if they knew, or should have known the items would be misused.



Source: News reports TheStar graphics

driven," he said.

Crime analyst Kamal Affandi Hashim said Malaysia already has provisions for caning under Section 420 of the Penal Code which covers cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property.

However, he stressed that its application depends on sufficient evidence and that beyond punishing offenders, anti-scam efforts should focus on assisting victims who could be accidental, targeted or compliant in believing they cannot be scammed.

"A three-pronged approach needs to be implemented: prevention through public education and media outreach; intervention via rapid responses such as the 997 hotline, bank freezes, legal assistance and timely legislation to help victims recover funds while culprits are punished," he said.