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10 Arrested in Multi-Crore 'Digital Arrest' Cyber Scam Based in Southeast Asia

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Chandigarh Cyber Crime Police have arrested 10 individuals for their alleged involvement in a massive transnational cyber scam that defrauded Indian citizens of crores of rupees through a method known as “digital arrest.” The scam was primarily operated from Southeast Asian countries, including Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, using fake identities and advanced technology such as SIM box equipment to carry out fraudulent calls and video chats.

The case came to light following a complaint from Manjeet Behl, a retired Army officer's widow in Chandigarh, who reported being coerced into transferring over ₹1 crore after receiving calls from individuals posing as officials from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and other government bodies. The scammers falsely claimed her Aadhaar number was linked to money laundering activities and used video calls with staged backgrounds of police stations and fake documents to convince her of the charges.

The police investigation revealed that the network was using SIM boxes to bypass telecom regulations and convert internet calls into local mobile calls, allowing scammers to impersonate legitimate agencies like TRAI, CBI, NIA, and FedEx. These setups enabled them to make more than two lakh calls per day, often in the form of interactive voice response (IVR) messages and follow-up impersonation calls.

The 10 accused, aged between 19 and 35, were arrested from cities including Ludhiana, Meerut, and Amritsar. Those arrested include SIM box operators, logistics handlers, and individuals responsible for collecting and activating hundreds of SIM cards using fake IDs. Key suspects include Parvez Chauhan, who operated a SIM box setup in Meerut and received payments in cryptocurrency, and Shubham Mehra, who managed the equipment and operations in Amritsar.

Authorities seized six SIM boxes, over 400 SIM cards, 11 mobile phones, five laptops, and network routers. They also froze ₹36.98 lakh from the accused's bank accounts. Police noted that the syndicate recruited Indian youths via social media platforms like Facebook and Telegram, luring them with fake job offers abroad. Once overseas, many were trapped and forced to work under coercive conditions in scam call centers.

Police believe the syndicate could generate over ₹1,000 crore per month by targeting vulnerable citizens across India. The Chandigarh Police are now collaborating with central agencies and the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre to track down further members of the international network and identify more victims.

Cyber Cell SP Geetanjali Khandelwal emphasized the urgent need for public awareness regarding such scams. She warned citizens to remain vigilant against calls claiming to be from law enforcement or government bodies, especially those demanding money transfers or sensitive personal information. The investigation is ongoing, with more arrests expected.