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Attempt to tamper local ATM machines averted

Alert officers prevent financial loss to the community

By: L.N. Reklai

Koror, Palau, April 25, 2016, a possible theft of personal banking information from ATMs in Palau was averted, when an attentive and well-trained Border and Customs officers detected an ATM card skimming device hidden inside a DVD player in package to be delivered to a visitor to Palau.

A Fed Ex package was received by Customs Office at the Palau International Airport. It originated from Indonesia and addressed to a non-resident female who supposedly was staying at a local hotel.

Customs Officer Nixon Rdiallul, upon inspection of the package, noticed a plastic sticking out of the DVD player that did not look like a normal part of the product. On a look out for drugs, the DVD player

was opened for further inspection. "The DVD player was empty, with no motor unit. It instead contained wires and plastics," says Customs Officer Foti Cooper. "Our guys thought these were parts of a bomb making devise and brought it for further inspection. I recognized it from our previous trainings that it may have something to do with bank machines. We called the police Director Aguon and met with Financial Investigations Unit," he added.



♦ ATTEMPT, 10 ATM Skimming device.



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"They brought the package here and we immediately identified it as an ATM skimming device. We contacted the FBI in Saipan because of the recent incident of ATM skimming in Saipan and compared notes," stated Nelson Werner of the FIU.

Managers of local banks were also alerted and called to identify the item and they all agreed that it was ATM skimming device. The device also had different fittings to fit different ATMS in Palau. "Those guys are doing an amazing job!" declared Matthew Cruz of Bank of Guam Branch, of the Customs officers. "It is such a small unassuming item but they caught it! Saipan did not catch it until after they have been impacted," added Cruz.

A team from Customs Office and Drug Taskforce arranged for a control drop of the package. The lady Maria Marisa, a Romanian passport holder, to whom the packaged was address, refused to accept the package. The lady and male companion, also a Romanian passport holder were interviewed extensively and both denied any knowledge of the package.

With not enough evidence to charge the lady and her companion, no arrest was made and the suspects departed Palau on April 27, 2016. The woman of interest, according to Immigration records, had been to Palau before. "In her first trip to Palau, she came through Guam right after the Saipan incident," stated Werner of FIU.

"We are in direct communication with the FIU offices in Manila, Indonesia, Italy and Romania as well as the FBI on this matter," said Werner. "The couples were not charged but any information we have on them including passport information, have been shared with relevant agencies," he added.

Early this month, First Hawaiian Bank in Saipan was targeted by card skimming devices. These devices are connected to ATM machines and collect the bank data and PIN numbers from people's ATM or credit cards when people use ATM. Information may be sold or used by others.

"Now that we know what this is, our officers are on high alert," stated Customs Officer Foti Cooper.

"We are very lucky we caught this before they were able to use it. A lot of people could have been affected," added Werner.

FIU press release urged the community to be mindful of the ATM card skimming threat and notify your bank or law enforcement personnel if anything suspicious with their local bank ATMs.

Angaur launches ...

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that the project aim is to revive, strengthen, and continue the tradition of taro patch practices (*olekiis, melisiich, mengeluolu e mellemolem a tekoi ra mesei*) with hopes that it will have a "domino effect" on the rest of Palau.

Governor Ngirutang elaborated that Angaur State will help individuals who are interested in developing and reviving the old taro patches. "This can bring many opportunities to the people of Angaur beside just food security," stated Governor Ngirutang.

Outlining his plans, Ngirutang sees opportunities in tourism and other economic opportunities as result of increased production of taro

Palau ranks 1st...

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and civil liberties as measured by Freedom House. Although it is home to China, where over half the world's Not Free population lives, and North Korea, the least free country in the world, a number of Asia-Pacific countries have made impressive gains in the institutions of electoral democracy—elections, political parties, pluralism—and in freedom of association," according to Freedom House publication.

May 1, 2016 will mark the first official meeting of the newly created Palau Media Council which is made up of independent members of Palau media as well as government media.

May 3rd is declared by United Nations General Assembly to be the World Press Freedom Day to raise awareness and importance of the freedom of the press.

BMR directs

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The BMR Acting Director went on to say that the program has received many approved requests from community members who would like to be clam farmers and the Bureau is doing its best to accommodate them. Usually it is a first come, first serve policy in the scheduling of the construction of new clam pens and the Acting Director says that after the ongoing trochus assessment, the PMDC, which has several technicians undertaking the survey, will return to their schedule and pick up the pace in erecting new clam pens.

The Bureau's pro-active effort to assist new clam farmers in increasing the number of seedlings to their stock has become a major objective and the Acting Director has already committed PACA to find marketing for the other farmers who, like most constituents in the grass roots communities, are hard pressed to easily have the money to purchase more seed to build up their