

Brazil Nabs 70 from Spyware and Phishing Scheme Gang

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The latest operation by the Federal Police in Brazil was called Galacticos, the same name the Internet gang nabbed in the action gave themselves. Galacticos is the way the players from the soccer team Real Madrid are known throughout the world.

Apparently that's how the criminal group felt like: the stars who couldn't be caught and who could flaunt their ill-gotten goods with impunity.

After almost two years of investigation, about 400 federal policemen from nine states in the Northeast, with the help of the Brazilian army, started to arrest the participants in a gang who used the Internet to steal money from bank accounts. The focus of the investigation was Imperatriz, in the northeastern state of Maranhão,

45 people had already been arrested this morning, but the police had arrest warrants for a total of 70 suspected of being involved in the plot. They are being chased in seven Northeastern states - Alagoas, Maranhão, Ceará, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, Piauí and Pernambuco - plus Tocantins and Pará in the north of the country .

The Galacticos used spyware and phishing schemes to obtain the passwords to peoples' bank accounts, mainly clients from Caixa Econômica Federal, the state-owned savings bank. The spyware was spread through spam containing false messages and through messages in relationship sites like Google's Orkut, which is immensely popular in Brazil.

The money obtained illegally was transferred to the accounts of unsuspecting third parties or was used to buy products through the Internet, to recharge pre-paid cell phones, and to pay for bank tickets. The scheme also counted on companies from the city of Imperatriz, which got part of the loot for helping in the criminal stratagem.

Those involved in the Internet scam are being charged with theft by fraud, gang formation, bank secrecy violation, illegal telematic interception and money laundering.