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### Cheque chicanery

AFTER Penang and Negri Sembilan, the counterfeit cheque scam is now revealed to have hit Malacca as well. The Malacca State Government uncovered the cheating earlier but it is surprising why it had kept silent when the police had already been called in to investigate. If the scam had been publicly disclosed earlier, other government agencies could have been alerted to the forgeries and the existence of an organised syndicate behind it.

Although Malacca's loss of RM770,000 is smaller than the RM3 million lost by Penang, both are equally culpable for the flawed procedures that allowed such amounts to be released. It is cause for concern that the scam was wider than expected. Obviously, there is urgent need for greater financial vigilance and improved monitoring. To prevent similar scams, State administrative and other government agencies should immediately take steps to comply with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's directive that all transactions involving government funds be instantly recorded so that any cheating will be detected at once. This will prevent money from being fraudulently siphoned out.

There is no room for complacency when safeguarding public funds and any criminal act should be nipped in the bud. If not, the crooks will be emboldened and try to go for even larger amounts from state coffers. With police investigation under way, there is no doubt that the masterminds and their accomplices behind the scam will be eventually brought to book and punished accordingly. But it should not end there. Any improved financial monitoring system is only as good as the people who man it. All staff involved in government finances should be adequately trained, disciplined and dedicated.