

Australia arrests dozens over app allegedly used by criminals worldwide

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Canberra, September 19 (RHC)-- Australian police have arrested a 32-year-old man for allegedly building and administering an encrypted message app used by organised crime gangs around the world to traffic drugs and firearms, launder money and order killings.

Jay Je Yoon Jung appeared in a Sydney court on Wednesday on charges related to the creation of the Ghost messaging platform, which authorities allege was “built solely for the criminal underworld.”

Australian Federal Police (AFP) said in a statement that Jung sold modified smartphones for 2,350 Australian dollars (\$1,600) apiece, alongside a six-month subscription to the network and tech support.

Created in 2017, Ghost was used by “hundreds of criminals” in Italy, the Middle East and South Korea as well as Australia, police said. The AFP said they arrested 38 suspects across Australia in recent days, while authorities were also carrying out near-simultaneous raids in Ireland, Italy, Sweden and Canada.

AFP Deputy Commissioner Ian McCartney said that Operation Kraken had seized 25 illicit weapons, disrupted 50 threats against people, and prevented the importation of more than 200 kg of illegal drugs.

“Taking down dedicated encrypted communication devices takes significant skill,” McCartney said in a statement. “But the holy grail is always penetrating criminal platforms to access evidence – and this is where the AFP is world leading.”

Colonel Florian Manet, who leads France’s Home Affairs Ministry National Cyber Command Technical Department, said that his team had provided “technical resources” to help their Australian colleagues infiltrate the network.

“A technical solution was implemented over several years which, at term, enabled the task force to access the communications of users on this secure platform,” Manet said in the statement issued by the AFP.

The infiltration of the Ghost network comes three years after the FBI used ANOM, an encrypted messaging app developed by the US law enforcement agency, as a trojan horse to secure the arrest of 800 criminal suspects in 16 countries.

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA and AGENCIES]

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