

Parliament No:	10
Session No:	2
Volume No:	81
Sitting No:	11
Sitting Date:	2006-04-03

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SINGAPORE

OFFICIAL REPORT

TENTH PARLIAMENT

PART III OF SECOND SESSION

VOLUME 81

Monday, 3rd April, 2006

The House met at 1.30 pm

PRESENT:

Mr SPEAKER (Mr Abdullah Tarmugi (East Coast)).

Mr Ahmad Khalis Bin Abdul Ghani (Hong Kah).

Dr Ahmad Mohd Magad (Pasir Ris-Punggol).

Mr Ang Mong Seng (Hong Kah).

Dr Balaji Sadasivan (Ang Mo Kio), Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts and Ministry of Health.

Mr Cedric Foo Chee Keng (West Coast).

Mr Chan Soo Sen (Joo Chiat), Minister of State, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Mr Chay Wai Chuen (Tanjong Pagar).

Dr John Chen Seow Phun (Hong Kah).

Mr Steve Chia Kiah Hong (Non-Constituency Member).

Mr Chiam See Tong (Potong Pasir).

Mr Charles Chong (Pasir Ris-Punggol).

Dr Chong Weng Chiew (Tanjong Pagar).

Mr Davinder Singh (Bishan-Toa Payoh).

Mr Arthur Fong (West Coast).

Mr Gan Kim Yong (Holland-Bukit Panjang), Minister of State, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Manpower.

Mr Andy Gan Lai Chiang (Marine Parade).

Mdm Halimah Yacob (Jurong).

Mr Hawazi Daipi (Sembawang), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Minister for Manpower.

Mdm Ho Geok Choo (West Coast).

Assoc. Prof. Ho Peng Kee (Nee Soon East), Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Law and Ministry of Home Affairs.

Ms Indranee Rajah (Tanjong Pagar).

Prof. S Jayakumar (East Coast), Deputy Prime Minister, Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Law.

Mr Khaw Boon Wan (Tanjong Pagar), Minister for Health.

Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan (Hong Kah).

Assoc. Prof. Koo Tsai Kee (Tanjong Pagar), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the

Minister for Defence and Minister for the Environment and Water Resources.

Dr Lee Boon Yang (Jalan Besar), Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts and Government Whip.

Mr Lee Hsien Loong (Ang Mo Kio), Prime Minister and Minister for Finance.

Mr Lee Kuan Yew (Tanjong Pagar), Minister Mentor, Prime Minister's Office.

Dr Warren Lee (Sembawang).

Mr Lee Yock Suan (East Coast).

Mr Leong Horn Kee (Bishan-Toa Payoh).

Mr Lawrence Leow Chin Hin (Nominated Member).

Mr Lim Boon Heng (Jurong), Minister, Prime Minister's Office.

Mr Lim Hng Kiang (West Coast), Minister for Trade and Industry.

Mr Raymond Lim Siang Keat (East Coast), Minister, Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Finance and Second Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Mr Lim Swee Say (Holland-Bukit Panjang), Minister, Prime Minister's Office and Deputy Government Whip.

Mr David T E Lim (Holland-Bukit Panjang).

Mr Loh Meng See (Jalan Besar).

Dr Loo Choon Yong (Nominated Member).

Miss Penny Low (Pasir Ris-Punggol).

Assoc. Prof. Low Seow Chay (Chua Chu Kang).

Mr Low Thia Khiang (Hougang).

Mr Mah Bow Tan (Tampines), Minister for National Development and Deputy Leader of the House.

Mr Matthias Yao Chih (MacPherson).

Encik Mohamad Maidin B P M (Marine Parade), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Home Affairs.

Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman (Sembawang), Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports and Minister for National Development.

Dr Lily Neo (Jalan Besar).

Dr Ng Eng Hen (Bishan-Toa Payoh), Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Defence.

Ms Irene Ng Phek Hoong (Tampines).

Ms Eunice Elizabeth Olsen (Nominated Member).

Mr Ong Ah Heng (Nee Soon Central).

Dr Ong Chit Chung (Jurong).

Mr Ong Kian Min (Tampines).

Dr Ong Seh Hong (Aljunied).

Assoc. Prof. Ong Soh Khim (Nominated Member).

Mr Othman Haron Eusofe (Marine Parade).

Mdm Cynthia Phua (Aljunied).

Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang (Nominated Member).

Mr R Ravindran (Marine Parade).

Mr S Iswaran (West Coast), Deputy Speaker.

Mr Seng Han Thong (Ang Mo Kio).

Mr K Shanmugam (Sembawang).

Mr Sin Boon Ann (Tampines).

have to be seen. But we have dealt with the Internet with a light touch and other than the party political sites and sites, like the Think Centre, this handful of sites is registered. All the rest of the individuals are expressing their opinions freely.

Mr Steve Chia Kiah Hong: I would like to clarify with the Minister. It is important.

Mr Speaker: If it is the same question, I think it is answered already.

Mr Steve Chia Kiah Hong: The clarification is that this individual, whom we do not know, is not our election agent or election helper. This is an individual in the constituency who wants to download anything and distributes it to the residents in the contested constituency. Is it an offence?

Dr Balaji Sadasivan: Sir, during the election period, anyone who distributes election material must be registered.

Column No : 1710

POSTING OF LEWD PHOTOGRAPHS ON BLOGS

10. **Mdm Ho Geok Choo** asked the Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts (a) whether his Ministry has taken any action against bloggers who deliberately post lewd photographs of themselves or others, with or without their consent, on their blogs; and (b) how many people have been charged for such offences.

Dr Balaji Sadasivan (for the Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts): Sir, I share the Member's concern about bloggers posting lewd photographs of themselves or others on their blogs. We recognise that blogs are a means of private communication used by individuals as well as groups. However, bloggers must realise that the materials they post in their personal blogs can be seen in the public domain. Posting of content, such as lewd photographs of themselves or others, would be offensive to many other Internet users. Bloggers could also run foul of the law. While some bloggers may do it deliberately, some others, especially young Singaporeans, may not be aware of the adverse consequences of their action. That is why we have emphasised the importance of developing public education programmes and industry self-regulation to work hand-in-hand with legal enforcement, so as to keep our online environment safe for all users.

To date, there has been no police report complaining about lewd pictures posted by Singaporeans or lewd pictures being hosted on blogs in Singapore. When the Police receive public information on such cases, they will investigate and assess each case. Where offences have been committed, they will investigate them thoroughly. If an offender is apprehended, he or she may be prosecuted. The Media Development Authority (MDA) will assist the Police with these investigations.

The Government recognises that legal enforcement alone is not enough, given the nature of the Internet where bloggers could be anonymous. It is crucial for us to address the issue by building up awareness and responsibility in using the Internet among our younger users. In this regard, education plays an important role whereby parents, schools and the community work together through various programmes to help promote safe practices online. The MDA has also funded public education efforts on the Internet.

Furthermore, the Government has been working actively with the industry and the local Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to promote greater industry self-regulation. This is to encourage the industry to provide a safe Internet environment for subscribers, especially families with young children. A positive result is that ISPs now offer Family Access Networks (FANs) to filter out undesirable websites to their subscribers.

Mdm Ho Geok Choo (West Coast): Sir, I would like to ask the Minister of State how would the Ministry actually be tracking the content in such blogs and, given the fact that the websites are actually public domain, what form of accountability is to be taken by or expected of the bloggers. I am heartened to note that there will be an educational approach taken. And to what extent will the Ministry be implementing such educational programmes?

Dr Balaji Sadasivan: I believe there are two parts to her questions. First, what measures are we taking to police, and second, the education messages. With regard to the first part, the MDA takes a light touch approach in regulating the Internet. So we do not police closely the blogger sites and what the bloggers put up on their blog sites. Because, by and large, bloggers want to communicate with their friends and to police all these blog sites would be intrusion into the life of the bloggers. However, if there is a specific complaint by a Singaporean to the Police about the law being broken by a Singaporean blogger, or a website hosted in Singapore, we will investigate and prosecute. Where we

do come across postings that are offensive, we have asked people to take them down. For example, MDA issued an ISP of Friday.com with a take-down notice in October and November when their website showed links to materials that depict incest and there were postings of members soliciting for sex. When the website Floutboy.com was found to be trading and exchanging naked photographs of underaged boys, the website was blacklisted. So Singaporeans cannot access that website. Where there have been specific complaints, we have taken action. But the Internet is a place where there is a lot of rubbish and it is not possible for the MDA to clean it up. So where we have specific complaints, we will look into it and try to clean it up. But what is important is educating our young so that they can protect themselves when they use the Internet.

She has asked what measures we are taking. Among the things that MDA has been doing, it has been actively supporting the efforts of volunteer groups, like Touch Community Services, to train and teach parents as well as teenagers on how to use the Internet. So far, MDA has provided over \$600,000 in funding to support Touch Community Services towards their programmes, in particular, the Cyberspace Risk & where U Seek Help (CRuSH) programme. So among the CRuSH programme, we have had the CRuSH roadshow, the project CRuSH Mandarin programme, the planet CRuSH programme. And these are all intended to educate young people about the Internet.

MDA has also spearheaded other initiatives to promote cyber wellness in 2005, there was a Cyber Wellness Pilot Run for Computer Training Centre in September 2005 to March 2006. Then there is the RestFest which was conducted between 24th and 27th November which was the world's preeminent festival of Innovative Moving Image which occurred in Singapore and, during that period, gained the opportunity to educate young people.

MDA is also collaborating with the School of Infocommunication Technology at the Singapore Polytechnic to produce animation clips, based on the theme "Internet Safety". So these are some measures that MDA is taking because education is the most important aspect of Internet safety, more so than policing.

Prof. Ivan Png Paak Liang (Nominated Member): Sir, the Minister of State mentioned the blacklist of Internet sites. May I ask him how long is that list nowadays?

Dr Balaji Sadasivan: The list has always been 100.

Mr Sin Boon Ann (Tampines): Can I ask the Minister of State whether he feels that MDA is satisfied with the level of funding and support that is given in the area of educating the children and users of the Internet?

Dr Balaji Sadasivan: I think to educate young people requires more than funding from MDA. It really requires teachers, parents and the community to get involved, and for parents to teach young children does not require funding. But if there are good projects that require funding that will enhance safety, we would consider it.

Mdm Cynthia Phua (Aljunied): I just want to emphasise that MDA should work closely with MOE because these are young children and those going into the Internet are getting younger. I would like to ask MDA to work closely with MOE in educating our children.

Dr Balaji Sadasivan: I totally agree with the Member that we will work with MOE in educating our young people.

Dr Wang Kai Yuen (Bukit Timah): I would like to find out from the Minister of State when will the content of these blogs start becoming from being just mere offensive to tenable and verifiable evidence that could be tendered in court for an act committed in Singapore that is punishable under the Penal Code, such as homosexual act, oral sex and sex with underaged ladies.

Dr Balaji Sadasivan: Sir, in any particular case, it will depend on the facts of the case. So if there is a site that a Member feels is objectionable, he can make a police report and then the Police, under MHA, will investigate directly and, if laws are violated, they will investigate.

Dr Wang Kai Yuen: Sir, would MDA not, in monitoring these sites and when they have found such a content on its own, make it as tenable evidence and pass it to the Police rather than have the complaint from the public? If the public makes a complaint, we are making an assumption that the public would peruse this and therefore find it offensive and