

Public education key to mitigating online threats: Edwin Tong

Scams, phishing and cyber attacks affect social cohesion, says minister

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Technology has made life more convenient but it also poses significant risks as some use it to carry out harmful activities such as scams, and public education is key to mitigating the threats.

Second Minister for Law Edwin Tong, making this point on Sunday, also said scams, phishing and cyber attacks, and disinformation campaigns do not just threaten people's money and time.

He added: "They also undermine social cohesion when people become less trusting of one another in a society where we're trying to make ourselves more tightly knit."

Mr Tong, who is also Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, was speaking to around 200 lawyers who do pro bono work, partners and guests at the launch

on Sunday of the eighth edition of Law Awareness Weeks@CDC (Law@CDC).

This year's series of legal talks, aimed at equipping the public with basic legal knowledge, has a focus on cyber safety and features 11 live-streamed webinars from Sept 27 to Oct 27 on this topic and more.

At the launch of the latest edition of the Law Awareness Weeks@CDC held at the Singapore University of Social Sciences on Sunday were (from left) Mr Desmond Choo, Mayor of North East District; Ms Denise Phua, Mayor of Central Singapore District; Ms Low Yen Ling, chairman of the Mayors' Committee and Mayor of South West District; Mr Edwin Tong, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, and Second Minister for Law; Mr Alex Yam, Mayor of North West District and Host Mayor of Law@CDC 2022; Mr Mohd Fahmi Aliman, Mayor of South East District; and Ms Sun Xueling, Minister of State for Home Affairs, and Social and Family Development.

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Singapore saw 14,349 scam cases from January to June, up from 7,746 in the same period last year. The most common types of scams included job, phishing, e-commerce and investment scams.

Noting that online threats involve anonymous adversaries who are not bound by geography, he

said: "The digital domain is fraught with danger... If one is not guided and doesn't have access to tools and information (to protect oneself), it can be a very troubling and traumatic experience."

Law enforcement goes a long way in curbing online threats but upstream efforts are also key as

people would then know they have avenues to get help, he added.

The webinars in this year's Law@CDC will discuss topics such as how to spot and avoid scams, and shop online safely. Those interested can go to <https://lawawarenessweeks.cdc.gov.sg> for more information.

The event is jointly organised by Singapore's five community development councils (CDCs), Law Society Pro Bono Services, National University of Singapore (NUS), Singapore Management University, Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) and Singapore Corporate Counsel Association.

The CDCs and Law Society Pro Bono Services also signed a two-year memorandum of understanding on Sunday with the Singapore Police Force, National Crime Prevention Council and NUS Pro Bono Group. These parties will raise awareness about cyber safety, provide legal advice and help to refer members of the public to enforcement agencies, beyond the annual Law@CDC programme.

Fifty-eight lawyers and student volunteers also received certificates of appreciation on Sunday in acknowledgement of their efforts to help the community. They include Mr Richard Siaw, director of law firm R.S. Solomon, who has been giving talks on legal issues for the past eight years. The most recent one was with new migrant students and residents here, and it focused on how they can guard against scams.

"Perpetrators use our fear and greed, and we are at times very vulnerable. If they hit us at the right time, and we are somehow not guarded, we can fall prey to such scams," said the assistant superintendent of police-turned-lawyer.

His law firm's R.S. Solomon Foundation has partnered Law Society Pro Bono Services, Tian De Temple and SUSS to launch a community law centre in Singapore's north-east area to help those facing legal challenges.

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