

News

Victims of online harms mostly women & girls, S'pore working on new laws to protect victims: Edwin Tong

A new agency targeting online harms is expected to be operational from the first half of 2026.



Ilyda Chua |

mothership

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Singapore is working on new legislation to protect victims of harmful online behaviour, said Law Minister Edwin Tong.

Such behaviour, which may include the creation of deepfakes, child pornography, and abuse of intimate images, are "deeply distressing", Tong, also Second Minister for Home Affairs, said.

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They also disproportionately target women and girls.

Speaking to the 500 guests at the 150th anniversary of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) on Aug. 29, Tong said that the legislation will include the launch of a new government agency, the Online Safety Commission (OSC).

It is expected to be operational from the first half of 2026.

How it'll work

With the OSC, victims can file reports in the event that they are subject to an incident of online harm.

The OSC will assess if a harm has indeed taken place. If so, it will issue directives to the perpetrators, administrators, or online service providers, such as social media platforms.

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The directive will require them to put a stop to their actions.

"With the OSC, no longer will victims be entirely dependent on online service providers to do the right thing," Tong said.

Why it's necessary

Tong added that such incidents of harmful online behaviour have evolved and increased in recent times.

Over 50 per cent of legitimate user complaints about online harms went unaddressed at the first instance by social media companies, according to an Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) report.

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Left to the discretion of online service providers, victims of online harms may feel powerless and uncertain as to whether their leaked images go viral, or if an employer or family members sees them.

"So we decided on having a commission with a system, with powers of regulation and also powers of direction," the father of three daughters said.

"This will ensure quicker takedown of the offending post, and restore a sense of agency to survivors of online harms."

More accountability

Previously, Minister for Digital Development and Information Josephine Teo mentioned the new agency and its possible powers at the Mar. 7 Committee of Supply debate.

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For instance, if recipients of such directives do not comply within a specified period of time, OSC could take further action.

Internet access service providers could be instructed to disable access to the online location hosting the harmful content.

The app containing the harmful content could also be removed from the app store.

The Ministry of Law said at the time it is also exploring a proposal to make the user information of perpetrators available to victims who have filed complaints with the agency.

Victims can then use the information for legal proceedings, if they wish.

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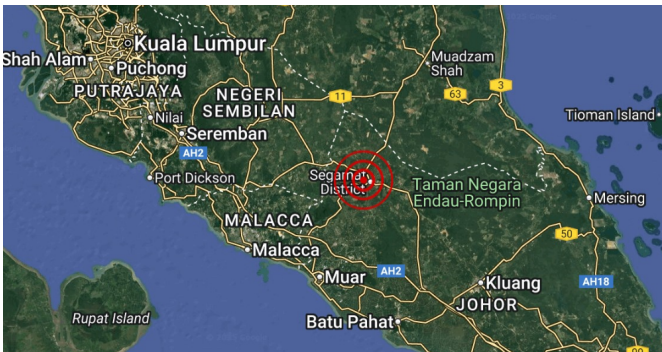
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