

Press Release

By CIRC, CyberSecurity Malaysia and PAGE

June 07, 2013.

Government urged to protect Malaysian students from cloud computing privacy intrusions and commercial exploitation

With increasing use of computers and cloud computing services in Malaysian schools and universities experts are urging the government to enact strict and effective guidelines to protect the online privacy of students in the face of service providers seeking to extend their penetration and influence to hundreds of schools nationwide.

To generate awareness of the trend, Cyber Security Malaysia together with CUTS Institute For Regulation & Competition (CIRC) and Parent Action Group for Education hosted a seminar in Kuala Lumpur on 7th June.

The seminar brought in leading speakers on internet privacy and students rights advocates. The seminar featured a distinguished panel of speakers including Pradeep S. Mehta, Chairman of CIRC and Secretary General of CUTS International (Consumer Unity & Trust Society), India, Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim, President of Parent Action Group for Education Malaysia (PAGE), Encik Rosly Yahil, Cyber Security Malaysia's Head of Outreach and students rights advocate Jeff Gould from SafeGov.org, USA.

Noor Azimah said putting data online can be opened to misuse by corporations. "It is not hard to imagine the risks involved when we give our privacy to someone else to keep. Aside from the more obvious reasons such as data being leaked or stolen, our children's data might be collected for targeted marketing.

"I believe digitalising education is an ambitious but much needed step to skill our students, and ultimately to reach a level that is on par with the developed world. But as with any change, we must be fully prepared for new responsibilities."

Noor Azimah and fellow privacy advocates are calling on the government to bring into force strict guidelines to govern the use of cloud computing by educational institutions such as universities, technical colleges and schools.

Jeff Gould, president of SafeGov.org, said the onslaught of cloud computing in schools was a major concern worldwide and that the problem was posing a major challenge to many school administrators. SafeGov.org is a forum for IT providers and the industry whose mission is to promote responsible cloud computing solutions for the private sector.

"Many schools in Malaysia and in other developed countries are planning to transition to cloud email and document creation services to save money," said Mr. Gould.

“This is a very positive trend because educators and IT practitioners are aware of the significant educational and social benefits which cloud computing can bring to students in helping the develop skills and excel in their exams,” he added.

“However, the use of cloud computing in schools has to be 100 per cent safe and secure. There is a dark side, one that many educators might not be fully aware of. By employing cloud computing in schools the possibility arises that businesses will be able to profile students based on the content of their emails, internet search habits and the content of online documents viewed. This information can then be used to target students with advertisements or other inducements, and caution must be exercised by the education authorities,” said Mr. Gould.

Mr. Rosly Yahil, Head of Outreach, CyberSecurity Malaysia noted the government is concerned about student privacy in the country and have implemented various measures such as creating a security programme to counter the misuse of such data in the public domain.

Mr. Rosly said, “We are doing our best but it is still not sufficient. The Internet is good but we have to be wise. Many children go online and interact with people they don’t know. That is a risk. We need to educate them and raise awareness, especially because scams and greed are part of human nature. We are trying to balance the social and educational values. And in the social sphere, we must follow ethics that protect the community.

“CyberSecurity Malaysia is open to suggestions and collaborations to achieve that goal and we have worked and collaborated with various corporations and organisations to ensure that appropriate security measures are in place as far as children are concerned.”

Mr Mehta said, “Consumer safety is becoming more important as technology is integrated into all aspects of our lives. In education, technology and the internet has created a virtual learning environment which has transformed education and teaching. While this is very powerful and a positive step forward in how we learn, we must also ask what is the price our students are likely to pay?

“There is currently a lack of awareness among parent and teacher groups of the risks of cloud computing and data mining but a lack of awareness does not mean there are no problems to be solved. There is a need to educate and regulate, to create rules to protect the privacy of our vulnerable children and to ensure that children, parents and teachers are active in this cause. We must all, think, speak up and act.”

A major challenge is the fact that some schools might be faced with a conflict of interest over student online privacy because cheaper or even no-cost cloud computing services require a trade-off.

“Parents and children should be given a guarantee by the school that no illegal or illicit data mining of student information is allowed under any circumstances. There is a price to

personal information, and school administrators must be careful to protect their students from any intrusion on their personal privacy,” said Mr. Gould.

###