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Proposed anti-harassment law only a temporary fix

FROM KWAN JIN YAO

The proposed anti-harassment law that was introduced in Parliament yesterday to curb cyber-bullying and other extreme misbehaviour on the Internet is an exercise in futility.

Practically speaking, it would be nearly impossible for the authorities to trace sources and identify and apprehend anonymous individuals who have broken the law.

Consequently, the supposed deterrent effect will lose its impact, especially when a derogatory post goes viral on social media channels. Even if the perpetrators were eventually nabbed, the damage would have been done.

As criminal defence lawyer Joseph Tan put it: "How much are we willing to spend to set up such a massive infrastructure ... to monitor and track the various social media platforms on a 24/7 basis?" ("Not easy" to enforce proposed anti-harassment law", March 1).

There is also uncertainty over the varying degrees of harm and dam-

age. Would "my feelings were hurt" be considered a legitimate claim? How does one decide if a victim has been genuinely affected by comments?

And if there truly were a lynch mob, who would be held accountable? Everyone involved?

Some might contend that courts will develop norms to test the reasonableness of claims and protect the victims. Yet these norms can emerge and evolve collectively without legal intervention.

In past instances, level-headed Singaporeans rallied against the racist comments of the fictitious "Heather Chua", while others were quick to condemn those who had launched unnecessary tirades against the family of Briton Anton Casey.

Associate Professor Eugene Tan believes that "the law will catalyse the development and growth of appropriate online conduct", but it would appear that such an informal code is already in place: To be kind, respectful and hold truth and veracity sacred.

It may be a slow process, but the online community has been heading

“Will the Bill reduce the number of abusive and hateful netizens? Marginally, perhaps. But the discussions about round-the-clock surveillance, investigations and prosecution ... have overshadowed the need for strong education and media literacy programmes in the long term.”

in the right direction for some time.

It is also a shame that the Bill was tabled before the conclusion of a large-scale study on the purported effects of cyber-bullying and cyber-addiction on teenagers by the Singapore Children's Society, the Institute of Mental Health and the National Institute of Education.

One would assume that the perspectives of about 3,000 young Singaporeans would give the Government a better picture of the situation and of how educators have been managing such conflicts.

Will the Bill reduce the number of abusive and hateful netizens? Marginally, perhaps. But the discussions about round-the-clock surveillance, investigations and prosecution, as well as punitive and retributive measures have overshadowed the need for strong education and media literacy programmes in the long term.

Legislation, at the moment, is akin to a Band-Aid. Hate and intolerance can never be eradicated, but we should try for better ways to curb such behaviour.

Service charge should benefit staff

FROM TANG LI

Having worked as a part-time waiter in a restaurant for the past two years, the letter "In a self-service world, should service charges stay?" (March 3) caught my attention.

The writer has raised an issue which affects every restaurant patron in Singapore — that of the service charge, which is levied on patrons regardless of the level of service provided. The writer is correct to state that there should be no reason a con-

sumer should be charged for service which is either poor or non-existent.

There is, however, another side to the story — namely the fact that there is little, if any, reward for service staff who provide decent service.

Waiters work long and physically demanding hours. They are obliged to attend to the whims and fancies of customers, no matter how unreasonable



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