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# YOUR OPINION

## Blueprint for youth online safety

THE government's plan to restrict children under 16 from accessing social media by June, using the framework of the Online Safety Act (Onsa), signals a strong commitment to youth protection. However, a "total lockout" approach and the proposed MyKad-based age verification raise critical practical and cybersecurity concerns.

A sweeping ban is a blunt regulatory tool that is notoriously difficult to enforce. Banning youths will inevitably drive some to use virtual private networks (which create encrypted Internet connections that allow private browsing) or migrate to encrypted messaging apps like Telegram, rendering them entirely invisible to parents and regulators. What we need is to foster digital literacy alongside these restrictions.

In this context, Meta's recent rollout of revamped Teen Accounts offers a highly instructive case study. (Meta owns and operates Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Messenger, and Threads. It introduced Teen Accounts in Instagram in late 2024 and extended them to Facebook and Messenger in 2025; a revamp to Instagram Teen Accounts was released this month.)

By placing younger users under strict default settings for privacy, disabling recommenda-



Photo posed by models/The Star

tions for sensitive content, and embedding mandatory parental controls, Meta has provided a tangible blueprint for what "safety by design" looks like in practice, rather than relying on reactive moderation after the fact.

From a regulatory standpoint, this is a significant and welcome shift. By mandating safe, highly restricted environments, we give youths a secure "training ground" to develop digital resilience.

Rather than pursuing an unenforceable blanket ban, poli-

cymakers should use this model to establish an industry-wide baseline. The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission's current regulatory sandbox should pivot from testing how to block youths entirely to testing how to protect them.

The upcoming Onsa subsidiary instruments should make these strict default privacy settings and restricted algorithmic feeds a mandatory licensing condition for all platforms operating in Malaysia.

This brings us to a major

cybersecurity concern. The Communications minister recently suggested standardising "age verification" using official government documents like the MyKad. If this verification requires platforms to directly collect and store MyKad data, we are facing a massive risk.

Social media platforms suffer massive data breaches. The 2021 Facebook data leak exposed the details of 533 million users, and in 2023, hackers posted e-mail addresses linked to 200 million Twitter accounts.

If social media giants cannot guarantee the absolute security of user data based on these past incidents, trusting them to directly verify and store our MyKad data could expose millions to severe identity theft. Trading one potential harm for another, more severe one is a deeply flawed policy.

Furthermore, if age verification requires platforms to collect and store MyKad data, it does not meet the spirit of data minimisation under Section 6 of Malaysia's Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA). The General Principle of the PDPA dictates that personal data processed must be "adequate but not excessive" in relation to its purpose. We cannot create a system where Onsa requirements actively conflict with the spirit of the PDPA.

If age verification is deemed absolutely necessary, we must look to privacy-preserving global best practices. Rather than submitting MyKad data to tech companies, Malaysia should adopt the "double-blind tokenised approach" recommended by Australia's eSafety Commissioner.

This approach involves an independent, regulated third party that verifies a user's age. This verifier then provides a secure token to the social media platform, confirming only that the user meets the age requirement. Crucially, the platform never receives or handles the user's personal identification documents, thereby protecting their privacy.

We must protect our youths, but not at the expense of their digital literacy or national data security. By pivoting towards mandated "safety by design" and privacy-preserving tokenisation, Malaysia can create a gold-standard regulatory framework that avoids the dangerous pitfalls of blunt bans and mass data collection.

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## Time for results-oriented action on floods

THE reprimand by Selangor Ruler Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah over the persistent flooding situation in the state should not be viewed as an isolated concern but as a national wake up call for all state governments across Malaysia ("Selangor Ruler takes state govt to task over floods", *The Star*, April 21; online at bit.ly/4euFO6v).

Flooding has become an increasingly frequent and severe challenge in many parts of the country, from urban centres to rural communities. Despite repeated assurances, budget allocations, and policy announcements, the reality on the ground suggests that flood mitigation efforts often fall

short of expectations. The heavy consequences are borne by ordinary Malaysians through damaged homes, disrupted livelihoods, and rising living costs.

The Sultan's firm stance highlights a critical point: flood management cannot remain a reactive, seasonal exercise. It demands sustained political will, competent governance, and long-term, science-based planning.

His earlier suggestion to seek expertise from countries such as the Netherlands, renowned for its advanced water management systems, points to the need for Malaysia to be open to global best practices rather than relying solely on frag-

mented domestic approaches.

All state governments must now take collective responsibility to:

- > Prioritise integrated flood management strategies that combine infrastructure upgrades, river basin management, and land use planning.

- > Restore flood plains – as removing or encroaching on them tends to worsen flooding – and ensure that river reserves serve as a protective margin between human activity and rivers.

- > Ensure transparency and accountability in the utilisation of funds allocated for flood mitigation.

- > Strengthen coordination between federal, state, and

local authorities to avoid duplication and inefficiencies.

- > Accelerate the adoption of modern technologies, data systems, and climate resilient solutions.

- > Engage communities meaningfully in preparedness and response efforts.

Equally important is the urgent need to address environmental degradation, such as deforestation, hill-cutting, and unregulated development, which continues to exacerbate flood risks nationwide.

The directive to clean up the Klang River further reflects the interconnected nature of flood mitigation and water resource management. Clean, well-maintained rivers are not

only essential for water supply but also play a crucial role in reducing overflow and improving drainage capacity.

In essence, this call must resonate beyond Selangor. Every state in Malaysia should treat it as a reminder that the cost of inaction is far greater than the investment required to implement effective solutions.

The time has come for decisive, coordinated, and results oriented action to safeguard the well-being of the rakyat and the resilience of the nation.

**MOHIDEEN ABDUL KADER**  
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RECENTLY, my daughter's teacher shared something in the class chat group that stayed with me. She had asked the children to talk about their fathers. We might expect young children to say things like "My father is strong", "My father works hard", or "My father plays with me". But some answers were painful to hear.

One child said his father was "bad" because he bullied him. Another said his father took his money. One said his father kicked him. Others said their fathers only scolded, slept until noon, or spent all their time on the phone.

## What children remember about their fathers

Children do not speak like adults. They do not know how to explain stress, bills, tiredness, or work pressure. They only know what they see and feel. To them, a father is not measured by how much he earns but by how safe, loved and noticed he makes them feel.

Many fathers love their children deeply and work hard for their families. That love is real. But perhaps this is also a gentle reminder that love must be felt,

especially by young children.

A child may not understand that Daddy is tired after work. He may only remember that Daddy shouted. A child may not know Daddy has worries on his mind. She may only remember that Daddy kept looking at his phone when she tried to talk to him.

This is not meant to shame fathers. Many are trying their best. Some grew up in homes where affection was rarely

shown. But every generation has a chance to do a little better. Fatherhood is not about being perfect. It is about being present. It is about being someone a child can run to, not run from.

I see the teacher's message as more than a classroom update. It was a mirror. If our children were asked to describe us honestly, what would they say?

Today, maybe we can start small. Put the phone down. Speak more gently. Listen a little

longer. Say sorry when we lose our temper. Hug our children before they stop asking for it.

One day, they may not remember every toy we bought or every bill we paid. But they will remember how it felt to be loved by us. I hope that when children speak of their fathers, warmth will be the first thing that comes to mind.

**ANG WEI ZHI**  
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