

Parliament No:	14
Session No:	1
Volume No:	95
Sitting No:	16
Sitting Date:	1-2-2021
Section Name:	Written Answers to Questions for Oral Answer Not Answered by End of Question Time
Title:	Impact of Change in WhatsApp's Privacy Policy on Government Communications
MPs Speaking:	Mr Alex Yam, Mr S Iswaran, Ms Joan Pereira

## **IMPACT OF CHANGE IN WHATSAPP'S PRIVACY POLICY ON GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS**

34 Mr Alex Yam asked the Minister for Communications and Information with the recent revision to WhatsApp's privacy policy (a) whether the use of WhatsApp channels by various Government agencies to communicate with the public will be impacted; (b) whether the Ministry has detected any decrease in the number of subscribers following the change in policy; and (c) whether businesses and organisations will need to review their WhatsApp policies for communication with the public to avoid breaching personal data protection protocols.

35 Ms Joan Pereira asked the Minister for Communications and Information in view of the changes to WhatsApp's terms and policy (a) what will be the impact on the Government in its use of WhatsApp for official communication among (i) public officers and (ii) Government agencies and individuals; and (b) whether it is permitted for a third party to share for commercial purposes the Government data which it has collected.

Mr S Iswaran: The Government has rules in its Instruction Manuals on the use of commercial messaging platforms. The communication of classified information through these messaging platforms is strictly disallowed. These rules remain relevant and are independent of the changes to the terms and privacy policies of the messaging platforms – WhatsApp or otherwise.

Public officers can continue to communicate non-classified information on these commercial messaging platforms, such as publicly available information, or information that will not impact Singapore's national interests and national security, including the sharing of opinions on general affairs outside the scope of their work.

The Government uses a variety of platforms to communicate. The number of subscribers to the Gov.sg WhatsApp channel is increasing and is at 1.22 million to date. Besides WhatsApp, the Government uses platforms, such as the Gov.sg website, Telegram, Twitter and more, for broadcasts of non-classified and publicly available information to keep the public updated with timely and accurate information.

Private sector organisations contracted by the Government to perform data-related activities, including the processing and communication of personal data, are bound by contractual terms and conditions. These will determine whether organisations are permitted to share, for their own commercial purposes, the data that has been provided by, or collected on behalf of, the Government. Depending on the nature of the data involved, organisations may also have to comply with the data protection requirements in the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) and adhere to the Official Secrets Act.

Regarding WhatsApp's updated privacy policy and sharing of personal data with Facebook, the Personal Data Protection Commission is engaging the company and looking into the concerns raised by consumers. Private sector organisations that use WhatsApp as a business communications tool should be aware of the changes and review their data protection policies and contracts with third parties to ensure they continue to align with the requirements under the PDPA.

---