

Ministry looking at updating harassment laws

Amir Hussain

Today, 12 November 2013

To deal with issues such as online harassment, the Ministry of Law is “actively” looking into updating the Republic’s harassment laws, Law Minister K Shanmugam said yesterday.

Speaking at a dialogue session during the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Conference on Civil Society, Mr Shanmugam said the Government has faced “tremendous pressure from the public to update our harassment laws to deal with online harassment”.

Singapore is also “behind the curve” when compared to other jurisdictions such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand in this area.

He added: “But then, you also start thinking in terms of workplace harassment, because harassment is not just online. Workplace harassment, sexual harassment, cyber-bullying, bullying of children, schools — a whole lot of issues. I think one’s got to look at all these issues together.”

Mr Shanmugam was responding to IPS Research Fellow Carol Soon, who had asked the Law Minister whether he foresaw “the law taking a back seat, or a further back seat, in order to allow voices of reason to triumph and for self-regulation to materialise”.

Mr Shanmugam replied that absent a criminal activity, he does not see the Government having a role in intervening in the online world. Instead, it would provide a framework, where people can handle debates themselves.

While people should be able to go to court if they feel that their rights have been infringed, he added: “Given the proliferation of online viewpoints, I think we also got to look at solutions other than running to the law all the time, in terms of criminal activity or even in terms of civil suits.”

For example, if a person feels that he or she has been harassed but does not want to sue, that person can pursue alternatives such as having a correction posted online.

“Maybe, that’s an easier solution rather than spending time, money, in courts,” Mr Shanmugam said.