



Securing digital ID sovereignty

AS Malaysia embarks on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's directive for digital ID registration, it's crucial to recognise this as more than a technological advancement.

This initiative places personal digital sovereignty, which refers to individuals' right to have full control over their own data in the digital realm, as its primary focus.

The national digital ID system inherently involves extensive gathering and manipulation of data, thereby intensifying concerns over privacy and data security. These concerns are exacerbated by pre-existing challenges, including Malaysia's inadequate cybersecurity literacy and a scarcity of cybersecurity professionals, as identified by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) and CyberSecurity Malaysia.

To tackle these problems, it is

imperative for Malaysia to adopt stringent data protection legislation. The revised personal data protection legislation should include explicit protocols for data management and consent mechanisms along with strict penalties for any breaches of data.

Crucially, these laws should grant individuals the authority to exercise control over their data, including the right to access, rectify and erase it.

This legal framework must also be applicable to personal data handled by both private entities and the government to guarantee a consistent level of protection in all sectors.

Implementing decentralised data management, potentially leveraging blockchain technology, has the potential to substantially mitigate the risk of extensive data breaches.

It is also crucial to prioritise the improvement of cybersecurity

awareness and education in order to empower individuals in protecting their digital identities.

The wider ramifications of the digital identification system on the sovereignty of national data and the localisation of data must not be disregarded. This means the data of citizens must be stored and processed exclusively within the country's borders – an essential precautionary step in the context of transferring data across national boundaries.

The implementation of localisation is crucial for upholding national security and safeguarding personal privacy, hence it should be overseen by a strong regulatory framework.

Uncompromising transparency is essential at every stage of the development and implementation of the digital ID system. The government should actively participate in transparent discussions with diverse stakeholders,

including the private sector, academia, civil society and ordinary citizens, in order to cultivate trust and ensure inclusivity of all perspectives.

The involvement of multiple stakeholders is crucial in identifying and mitigating potential risks as well as developing effective and inclusive strategies. Public-private partnerships must be regulated by ethical standards to prevent conflicts of interest.

Consistent and transparent communication regarding the objectives, procedures, advantages and potential drawbacks of the system is crucial for establishing and preserving public confidence and endorsement.

Ultimately, Malaysia's endeavour to implement a digital identification system represents a noteworthy stride towards a more technologically advanced and streamlined future.

EMAIL editor@thestar.com.my or
MAIL The Editor, Menara Star, 15, Jalan 16/11, Section 16, 46350 Petaling Jaya. Letters must carry the sender's full name, address and telephone number. A pseudonym may be included.

UUM/AA70/TS/30.11.2023/P:15(1-5)

However, this endeavour must be supported by a firm dedication to safeguarding individual digital autonomy, guaranteeing national authority over data, and upholding transparency throughout the entire process.

Malaysia can establish a commendable global benchmark for responsible and inclusive digital governance by enacting strong legal safeguards that are applicable to all entities handling data, including the government, and by engaging in transparent and inclusive policy development.

This strategy will not only protect digital rights and freedoms but also promote a feeling of shared ownership and confidence in the digital ID initiative.

PROF TS DR SUHAIDI

HASSAN

Fellow, Science, Technology and Innovation Cluster
Akademi Profesor Malaysia