

NUS launches think-tank to explore legal issues in tech

New research unit will examine issues surrounding AI, data analytics, robotics

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In the hope of promoting inter-disciplinary research in technology law, the National University of Singapore (NUS) has opened a research centre for legal issues surrounding artificial intelligence (AI), robotics and data analytics.

The new Centre for Technology, Robotics, Artificial Intelligence and the Law (Trail) will be a think-tank under the faculty of law.

It was officially opened yesterday by Senior Minister of State for Law and Health Edwin Tong.

In a statement, the university said the centre has already started conducting research into the regulatory questions associated with the deployment of AI, information technology, data analytics and robotics in the practice of law.

It is also examining privacy and data protection issues from the per-

spectives of computer science and law, and plans to probe the legal and ethical issues surrounding biotechnology.

The launch of the centre was held at an international academic conference on data privacy at NUS.

Speaking at the conference, Mr Tong said Trail will be able to work with partners locally and globally to produce valuable research and policies that will benefit societies in the rapidly growing digital age.

“The increasingly rapid pace of technological developments in fields like artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, Internet of Things and autonomous vehicles means the law has to respond even more quickly,” he added.

In his speech, Mr Tong outlined several challenges that technological advancement has presented to Singapore, and how the Government has approached them.

One of these challenges has been



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in setting regulations that balance the need to protect public interest with promoting innovation.

The Government, he said, has responded by rolling out regulatory sandboxes in areas like transportation, fintech and healthcare that al-

low for experimentation within controlled boundaries.

Another challenge lies in how technology has allowed bad actors to create, disseminate and profit from online falsehoods.

Mr Tong noted that fake news

can culminate in violence and death, and can also cause society to be divided, which is why the Government has acted to protect Singapore.

Earlier this year, the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act was passed in Parliament.

It allows Cabinet ministers to act against a piece of falsehood on the Internet and order for it to be taken down, or ask for corrections to be put up alongside it.

Mr Tong said Trail has an important role to play with regard to research and thought leadership in the field of law and technology.

He urged its researchers to engage the Government and the public to improve lives.

“I invite you to have conversations among yourselves, but also to have conversations with other stakeholders and with the policymakers and the public, so that we can together create a set of laws, regulation landscape and indeed an environment that we believe we can operate in,” he said.

The research unit currently consists of 12 academic fellows, including NUS law faculty dean Simon Chesterman.

It is led by NUS law faculty’s Associate Professor Daniel Seng, who is its director.

He will be assisted by two deputy directors – Prof David Tan from the university’s faculty of law, and Prof Chang Ee-Chien from the School of Computing in NUS.

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