

OFCA and IMDA sign MOU to strengthen collaboration in tackling scam and spam communications (with photo)

The Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) of Hong Kong and the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) of Singapore signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in Singapore today (June 11) to further strengthen co-operation in combating scam calls and messages as well as managing spam communications.

Signed by the Director-General of Communications, Mr Chaucer Leung, and the Deputy Chief Executive and Director-General (Telecoms and Post) of the IMDA, Ms Aileen Chia, at a bilateral meeting, the MOU seeks to strengthen strategic collaboration, support and exchange of information between Hong Kong and Singapore in areas including regulatory practices, public education and development of technical solutions to address and mitigate issues relating to scam and spam communications (including calls and Short Message Service (SMS) messages).

"Through the timely exchange of information and co-operation, the MOU enables the two regulatory agencies to share insights about the latest market trends and developments, and to more effectively address the growing threats and nuisance brought by cross-border communications faced by the people of the two places. The even closer partnership and collaboration between OFCA and the IMDA that has ensued will help develop a more robust telecommunications regulatory regime for both jurisdictions," Mr Leung said.

OFCA and the IMDA have a fine tradition of conducting annual bilateral meetings since 2004. Over the 20-year close relationship, areas of discussion and experience sharing have included the landscape and development of telecommunications markets, regulatory and enforcement issues, and initiatives in stepping up public education and publicity on communications and anti-scam/spam matters.

To protect telecommunications users against frauds and maintain the integrity of Hong Kong's communications infrastructure, OFCA has been collaborating with various government departments in implementing a range of measures to tackle scam and spam communications from the perspective of telecommunications services, including:

- (a) launching the SMS Sender Registration Scheme in December 2023 to help identify genuine SMS messages and fully implementing the Real-name Registration Programme for Subscriber Identification Module (SIM) Cards (the RNR Programme) since February 2023 to enhance the integrity of the mobile communications regime;
- (b) providing designated telephone numbers to government departments and public organisations for communication with the general public;

- (c) directing telecommunications service providers to block and suspend services of suspected fraudulent numbers and suspicious websites as referred by the Police, and monitor calls originating from their networks to detect any irregular/suspicious activities;
- (d) working closely with various call-filtering apps developers and major telecommunications service providers to encourage wider use of call-filtering services to manage and safeguard incoming calls; and
- (e) stepping up public education and publicity efforts to raise public awareness against phone scams, including collaboration with Legislative Council Members and district councillors on series of promotional campaigns.

Through the above joint efforts, by the end of April this year, telecommunications service providers had rejected 2.21 million registration requests and cancelled 1.67 million non-compliant pre-paid SIM cards' registrations under the RNR Programme. Following referrals by the Police, over 9 700 website links were blocked and more than 3 800 phone numbers were suspended or blocked due to suspected involvement in fraudulent activities. In addition, around 690 000 local phone numbers with suspicious calling patterns were also suspended by telecommunications service providers.

