

7 APRIL 2015

PMO Website Hoax:
Stern Warning Administered

1. On 18 March 2015, a photograph of a computer apparently showing a webpage from the Prime Minister's Office website was circulated via messaging apps and online. The image appeared to announce the demise of Mr Lee Kuan Yew.
2. After investigation, Police identified the originator of the photograph. The person, a student under 16-years-old ("Z"), was located, and interviewed.
3. No "hacking" or unauthorised access of the PMO website had taken place. Crucially, Z had never intended his "hoax" message to be widely disseminated. Z stated that he created the image because he was frustrated with the frequent rumours about the demise of Mr Lee. Z wanted to demonstrate to his friends how easy it was for a hoax to be perpetuated. Z shared the image with his friends. Less than two minutes later, he informed his friends the image was not an actual photo, but by then the image had been forwarded by one or more of the original recipients.
4. After thorough investigations, Police referred the matter to the Attorney-General's Chambers. AGC has directed that Z be administered a stern warning (in the presence of his parents) for contravening section 45 of the Telecommunications Act.
5. This decision was taken after carefully considering all relevant factors including Z's personal circumstances and readiness to accept responsibility. Z has been extremely contrite and deeply regrets the embarrassment and confusion he has caused. He has cooperated fully with the police and explained the circumstances that led to his creation of the photograph.
6. As Z is a "young person" (i.e. below the age of 16 years), no information about his identity, or that could lead to his identification (including his school or other information about him) should be published – whether on paper or online – or broadcast.

7. With the convenience of electronic communication tools, messages can be disseminated with great ease. However, there is also a risk of false information spreading very quickly, as in this case. Netizens should be aware that the careless, or deliberate dissemination of false information can have serious consequences for the public at large. Sometimes it can even cause widespread panic. Disseminating false information can be a serious criminal offence, especially if the originator knows that the information is false.

**ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S CHAMBERS
MEDIA RELATIONS UNIT**