



News Release

A National e-Safety Strategy for Online Safety

Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain - Monday 25 October 2010

H. E. Sheikh Ahmed bin Atiyatallah Al Khalifa, Minister of Cabinet Affairs, Minister Responsible for the Telecommunications Sector and the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of the Kingdom of Bahrain (TRA) unveiled a “Roadmap for the Future” that will ensure a safer online environment for the Kingdom of Bahrain based on the recommendations of the Kingdom’s first State of the Nation Review into internet and digital media safety awareness and risk assessment. This is also the first study of this type to be undertaken in the wider Arab region.

In his key note speech H.E. Sheikh Ahmed said “We cannot imagine our life without the internet, without mobile phones and the latest devices connected to the internet. While the internet has a wealth of good attributes and uses, it also attracts criminals. These criminals realised that there are large financial gains to be made from exploiting our vulnerable; our child, our identity, our bank account and our life.”

H.E. Sheikh Ahmed announced key initiatives by saying “Everyone in the Kingdom will be offered a free interactive tutorial on internet safety. This tutorial will not only provide information about how the Internet works, but show internet users how to use the applications available. The tutorial will give advice on how to stay safe, avoid the pitfalls of using the internet and how to protect family. Every tutorial will include an antivirus software suite that can be installed if required for virus protection. We are aiming to ensure that in the coming months every computer in Bahrain is installed with legal and up to date anti-virus software.”

H.E. Sheikh Ahmed also announced that the Government will also be seriously consider creating a working group for Child Internet Safety which will be made up of Government agencies, TRA, Law makers, Industry and NGOs. The remit of this group will be to ensure that the recommendations presented in the State of the Nation Review are implemented without delay.

The State of the Nation Review explored the experiences and level of awareness amongst young people (aged 7 to 18) and adults regarding use of the internet and general digital media safety. The findings are based on a combination of the results from a large quantitative research study supported by qualitative research techniques in public and private sector schools.

The State of the Nation Review identifies and analyses Internet safety issues amongst adults and children, and sets out recommendations to ensure the safety of young people and adults navigating the internet.

The main findings of the study were:

- Internet security awareness appears to be generally low among Adults. Adults are frequently exposed to negative online experiences and do not have a reliable source of information to consult regarding internet advice.
- A significant number of young people had their profile on Social Networking Sites set to public and did not know how to set it to private. Generally older children in the 14-16 and 17-18 age groups took the most risks; they were more likely to have shared personal information with a stranger.
- A high number (43%, 1,090) of young people had met with an online contact who they had not met in person before. Public school children were more likely to meet an online stranger from contacts on the internet than private school children. Girls at public schools took more online risks than girls at private schools.
- Cyber bullying was identified as a problem by young people and by teachers, particularly in private schools. Teachers often feel deskilled as many young people are more computer literate than they are. The majority of children had not received internet safety training at school.
- There is currently no legislative framework that either seeks to protect children from internet related or other forms of abuse, or that seeks to protect adults from cybercrime (other than basic e-transaction legislation passed in 2002).
- There is an increasing trend of young female teenagers interacting with male peers online. Parental reaction is sometimes extreme, and has resulted in a number (unspecified – but 7 confirmed cases in April 2010) of suicide attempts.
- There is currently no precedent for prosecuting cases of sexual abuse and physical abuse. There is no mandatory referral law in Bahrain, but there is a professional requirement for health professionals to refer abused children to the Child Protection Committee.
- There is a strong social class digital divide in the Kingdom. Poorer, less educated parents have lower computer literacy and understanding of internet safety issues, and stakeholders suggested that there may be a greater tendency to exert extreme physical punishment upon children.

It is recommended that:

1. A committee should be established to set out and ensure the implementation of the Kingdom's child e-safety strategy.
2. The proposed legislative child protection framework be introduced and implemented in respect of the online luring clause.
3. Training for police officers and prosecutors should be introduced to ensure effective implementation of the new legislation.
4. The implementation of cybercrime legislation.
5. ISPs and TRA should play an active role in providing safety and technical advice on computer protection to adult Internet users.

6. A comprehensive internet safety training programme to be developed for both the private and public school sectors as part of the curriculum.
7. Young people should be consulted on the most appropriate and effective means of delivering the program, and on program design.
8. Schools should introduce a designated e-safety staff function to ensure that programs are delivered on a rolling basis in each school, and that outreach safety advice work is undertaken with parents.
9. Schools and NGOs should play an active role in working with parents to raise awareness about Internet safety and about the nature of young people's online behaviour.
10. A far reaching media campaign should be organised to deliver safety messages that appeal to different audiences.

TRA's Chairman and Acting General Director, Dr. Mohammed Al Amer said "The results of the online safety study indicate that our children are exposed to real dangers and unaware of the risks that they are taking every time that they enter the online environment. In many cases they are of or know people that have been victims but are misguided by a belief that it will never happen to them."

Dr. Mohammed went on to say "Collectively, all the relevant government agencies, judiciary, law enforcement agencies, educational authorities and establishments, and industry stakeholders are involved in the protection of children. Together we are building and implementing a national e-safety policy that addresses all of the recommendations of this study to create safer internet environment."

State of the Nation Review full report and executive summary can be found on TRA's website at www.tra.org.bh.

About TRA

Since its establishment in 2002 the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of the Kingdom of Bahrain (TRA) has been working with government, consumers, operators and investors to develop the Kingdom of Bahrain into the region's most modern communications hub and to facilitate the growth of the market. As an exemplary Regulator for the region, TRA independently carries out its duties in a transparent and non-discriminatory manner. More information about TRA can be viewed at www.tra.org.bh

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