

IN FOCUS:

# SEADS FEATURE



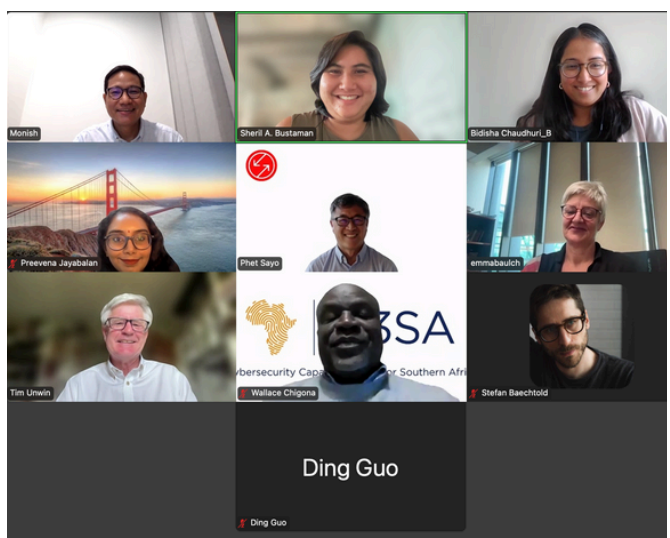
## ICT Policies and Development Politics in the Global South

On the 25th June 2025, SEADS, in collaboration with Monash University Malaysia, held its fourth public panel of the year exploring the intersections of digital technology, governance, and development across the Global South.

Held virtually, the session brought together leading thinkers and practitioners from around the world to critically unpack the evolution of ICT4D (Information and Communication Technologies for Development) and the challenges of emerging technologies like AI. The event was opened by Dr Emma Baulch, Director of SEADS, who shared SEADS' mission to foster dialogue across academia, civil society, and industry, particularly around digital governance, tech-facilitated harm, and the political economy of technology in Southeast Asia.

### ● Key Takeaways

- The politics of technology are now central to ICT4D debates — digital tools are no longer seen as neutral solutions.
- AI risks repeating old patterns of inequality, with industry-driven narratives shaping development goals.
- Data sovereignty and the environmental cost of digital infrastructure, like data centres, demand urgent global attention.



## DIGITAL INCLUSION AND WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

In collaboration with ARROW and DATUM Initiative, the SEADS' July 2025 event will feature the launch of a National Report on *Monitoring the SDGs at 10 Years: Sexual and Reproductive Health and the Lived Experiences of Women and Individuals Assigned Female At Birth with Disabilities in Malaysia* as well as a panel discussion on *Digital Inclusion and Women with Disabilities*, which will focus on how disabled people are often left out in interactions with the state and everything else, but digital technologies and tools provide accessibility options and kinship communities which has greatly improved the lives of women with disabilities.



**Date:** 29<sup>th</sup> July 2025

**Time:** 10am to 1pm

**Venue:** Mereka, Publika Shopping Gallery

Event is free via registration.

[Register for the event here!](https://forms.gle/b8fX3S2FKMYINJCA)

### ● Our Panelists



**Dr Benjamin YH Loh**  
DATUM Initiative



**Adhura Farouk**  
Boleh Space



**Beatrice Leong**  
Autism Inclusiveness Direct Action Group (AIDA)



**Dr Dyah Pitaloka**  
SEADS

### Moderated by

## Online Safety Act 2024: Vague Promises & Growing Concerns

Featuring: Dr Benjamin YH Loh

The Online Safety Act 2024, passed and gazetted in Malaysia, aims to enhance internet safety, particularly for children.

However, concerns about vague definitions, overreach of authority, and lack of transparency remain unresolved, according to Dr Benjamin YH Loh.

In the interview, Dr Loh highlighted key issues:

- **Unclear Definitions:** Terms like “online harm” remain vague. A joint council is expected to define them, but this process happens outside Parliament, raising accountability concerns.
- **Expansion of MCMC Powers:** The Act grants the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) powers to access data, seize devices, and conduct searches, often without warrants. Critics worry this cements MCMC’s role as the “internet police.”

### Media Feature BFM



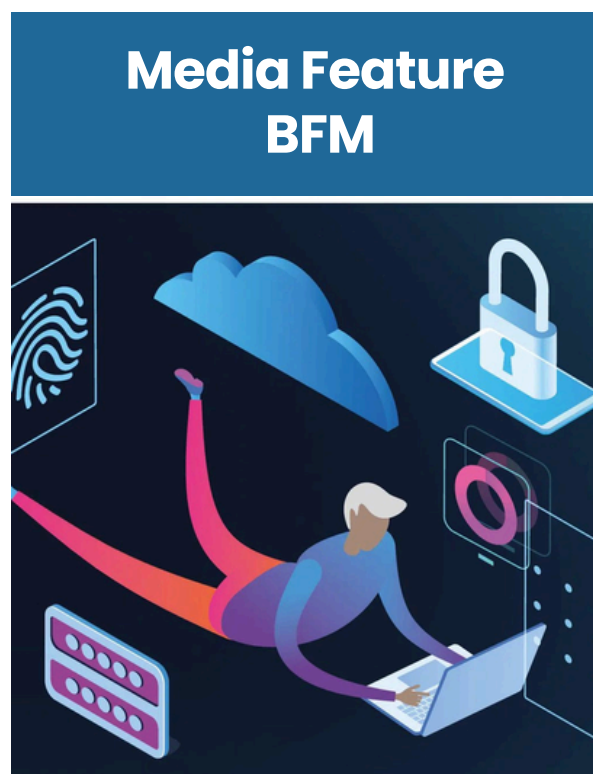
- **Limited Impact on Organised Crime:** While the Act may help dismantle small-scale harmful content groups, Dr Loh doubts its effectiveness against large, organised cybercrime operations.

The conversation also criticised the social media licensing regime, describing it as ineffective and possibly a tool to restrict free speech. Platforms not registered face unclear consequences, with enforcement appearing inconsistent.

Dr Loh urged public vigilance, noting the Act overlaps with other laws like the Sedition Act and the Communications and Multimedia Act, giving authorities broad, unchecked powers.

Without clear definitions and judicial oversight, civil society faces heightened surveillance risks.

**Takeaway:** The Act's enforcement looms, but legal clarity, safeguards, and public engagement remain lacking. Critics warn that, without reform, the law risks undermining both internet freedom and public trust.



[Listen to the full episode from BFM's Morning Brief here.](#)



**Dr Benjamin YH Loh** is the Course Director of the Bachelor of Digital Media and Communication at Monash University Malaysia's School of Arts and Social Sciences. A media scholar specialising in digital ethnography, his research explores the intersection of technology, society, and the experiences of marginalised communities. He holds a PhD in Communications and New Media from the National University of Singapore. Dr Loh has co-edited notable works, including *Sabah from the Ground* and *New Media in the Margins*, and frequently contributes opinion pieces to outlets like *Malaysiakini*, *The Vibes*, *SCMP*, and *Nikkei Asia Review*. He was previously a Visiting Fellow at the ISEAS Yusof-Ishak Institute, focusing on Malaysia's digital landscape.

## Data Sovereignty, or Digital Dependency?

By Preevena Devi

Owning your data sounds empowering. But what if sovereignty is just a slogan masking deeper dependencies?

Across the Global South, governments are racing to build data centres, promising control, security, and economic growth. But behind the glossy infrastructure lies a different reality.

Many of these centres run on imported expertise, foreign hardware, and supply chains tied to Big Tech giants. Without real capacity to manage or interpret the data, "sovereignty" risks becoming symbolic — the servers may be local, but the power isn't.

So, are we building autonomy, or reinforcing digital colonialism? Right now, it's both.

### ● Get In Touch With Us

SEADS is located at:

Building 2 Level 6, Monash University Malaysia  
Jalan Lagoon Selatan, Bandar Sunway  
47500, Selangor, MALAYSIA

Email: [sheril.bustaman@monash.edu](mailto:sheril.bustaman@monash.edu)

## Myth or Reality?



True data sovereignty isn't about server location, it's about ownership, expertise, and the ability to say no to exploitative tech models.

Until states invest in local capacity, tech literacy, and governance frameworks, the promise of independence remains unfinished.

Infrastructure is just the first step. Real sovereignty starts with control and ends with accountability.