

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### WHY?

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#### **Qn1: Why are prepaid SIM cards affected now?**

The move is part of an ongoing and holistic security review carried out by the Government to address security gaps. The issue of prepaid SIM card service is one aspect covered within the scope of the review.

#### **Qn2: How are prepaid SIM cards currently sold?**

Currently, a person can purchase a prepaid SIM card from any retailer that sells prepaid SIM cards. Prior to the change from 1<sup>st</sup> Nov, retailers would manually record the personal particulars of customers. From 1<sup>st</sup> Nov, retailers would use an electronic terminal device to register the personal details of customers.

#### **Qn3: Why introduce an electronic system/ terminal device?**

Over time and because of the exponential growth in the prepaid SIM cards market, some retailers have not observed the practice of manually recording the personal details of customers. For example, some retailers had recorded names like 'Santa Claus', while other retailers simply record their own names as having purchased the prepaid SIM card. The new electronic system is a more robust means for retailers to register the particulars of prepaid SIM card customers. Customers will also benefit as there would be more accurate recording of customer details.

### WHAT OTHERS DO

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#### **Qn4: Is Singapore the only country doing this?**

Switzerland and Australia have introduced laws to make it compulsory for users of prepaid SIM cards to be registered. In addition, in response to the London bombings, the Council of the European Union discussed mandatory retention of telecommunication data to facilitate investigations by law enforcement agencies.

Recently, the media also reported the Malaysian and Thai government's announcement that it would make it mandatory for service providers to register customers' particulars.

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**WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO?**

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**Qn5: Do I have to pay for re-registration? What about registration?**

Customers will not be charged for registration or re-registration.

**Qn6: When I bought the prepaid SIM card, I did hand over my NRIC for the operator to photocopy. Can't the service provider use that, rather than require me to personally go down to the shops to re-register?**

The prepaid SIM card market has grown exponentially. By August this year, the figure has exceeded 1.4 million subscribers. This shows that the number of prepaid SIM cards has grown by more than 120 times since 6 years ago. Along with the exponential growth, some retailers have not recorded customer particulars correctly. As a result, in order to ensure that customer particulars are accurately recorded to ensure a robust system, all existing prepaid SIM card users are required to re-register their prepaid SIM cards. This also safeguards existing customers and prevents cards from being erroneously registered against their personal particulars.

**Qn7: In this one week before 1 Nov, why don't the retail outlets ensure to get our particulars and then we won't need to re-register after 1 Nov? It's very silly, isn't it, for us to go and submit our ICs for photocopying and then one week later, come back to re-register? Why are we wasting each other's time?**

The new registration system will capture customers' personal particulars electronically. This is unlike the current way where retailers manually record customer particulars. The date 1 Nov 2005, is the earliest that the electronic registration system can be put in place. We encourage customers who can wait, to purchase prepaid SIM cards from 1 Nov 2005. Customers who purchase prepaid SIM cards before 1 Nov 2005, need to re-register their prepaid SIM cards in order that all customer particulars are captured accurately and electronically. We seek your understanding and cooperation.

**Qn8: Between 1 Nov and 1 May 2006, can I top up my existing prepaid SIM card even through I have not re-registered?**

All prepaid SIM cards which are not registered by 1 May 2006, will be deactivated. Existing prepaid SIM card customers who have not re-registered can still continue to use and top up their prepaid SIM cards, if they re-register by 1 May 2006.

**Qn9: Why are Singaporeans not allowed to use their passports?**

Identification documents which contain a photograph identity of the person, and which have security features, were selected for this purpose. For Singaporeans in Singapore, the identity cards, rather than passports, are the most natural form of identification. Not every Singaporean has a passport. For

standardisation of identification, the identity card will be used for Singaporeans to register prepaid SIM cards.

**Qn10: What if I lose my NRIC? During that period, can I register with my passport instead?**

Any Singaporean or Permanent Resident who loses his identity card should lodge a police report as soon as possible. The person is required to produce the police report in order to apply to the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority for a replacement identity card. An existing prepaid SIM card customer may wish to obtain his or her replacement identity card before proceeding to re-register an existing prepaid SIM card or register a new prepaid SIM card.

**Qn11: Can I use a photostated copy of my identity documents to register?**

Only original identity documents can be used for registration.

**Qn12: Where can I go to re-register my existing prepaid SIM card?**

Subscriber details are owned by the respective service providers. An existing M1, SingTel or StarHub prepaid SIM card customer can re-register at retail shops that sell the prepaid SIM cards of the respective service providers. For example, an existing M1 prepaid SIM card customer cannot re-register at a retail shop which sells only SingTel or StarHub prepaid SIM cards.

**Qn13: Why can't I buy more than 10 prepaid SIM Cards? Why is there a limit?**

From a law-enforcement perspective, the fewer prepaid SIM cards a person can own, the lower the chances of the card being used as a tool to perpetuate crime. However, various non-security issues also needed to be weighed. MHA, in consultation with IDA and the service providers reviewed market trends which showed that the majority of prepaid SIM card subscribers usually register for up to five prepaid SIM cards. The cap set at 10 adequately caters to an entire family with grandparents and/or young or school-going children— some of whom may not be eligible to purchase their own prepaid SIM card.

**Qn14: Why can't a 14-year-old or younger buy prepaid SIM cards?**

We had explored several options to determine the most suitable approach. Currently, Singapore citizens who reach the age of 15 are issued identity cards. The new age requirement therefore facilitates the recording of personal details of customers. Children under 15 years of age are not disadvantaged because their parents or guardians can purchase prepaid SIM cards for their use.

**Qn15: I currently have 11/20/30 prepaid SIM cards - does this mean I can only re-register 10 of them? Who is going to refund me the balance of my cards?**

From 1 Nov 2005, each customer is limited to a maximum of 10 prepaid SIM cards. Customers who have more than 10 existing prepaid SIM cards registered under them, should decide which 10 prepaid SIM cards he or she would like to retain and continue to use by re-registering these prepaid SIM cards. As for the remaining prepaid SIM cards, the customer can continue to use them until 1 May 2006. Please check with your service provider on the possible ways to revalue your prepaid SIM cards.

**Qn16: I have different prepaid SIM cards from each operator. Do I have to go to each operator to re-register the cards? Is there a less time-consuming way for customers to re-register their cards?**

Subscriber details are owned by the service providers. Customers who have prepaid SIM cards by different service providers can go to shops that sell the prepaid SIM cards of their respective service providers for re-registration.

**Qn17: Can I get a refund on my prepaid SIM cards?**

All prepaid SIM cards which are not registered by 1 May 2006, will be deactivated. Please check with your respective Service Providers on the possible transfer of value in your prepaid SIM cards.

#### **WHAT PENALTIES?**

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**Qn18: What if I forget how many prepaid SIM cards I have bought and under which service provider? Will I be punished when I buy more than my quota?**

Each person can subscribe to a maximum of 10 prepaid SIM cards. For instance, 10 cards from one Service Provider or from a combination from the three Service Providers. Existing customers who have subscribed to more than 10 prepaid SIM cards would be allowed to re-register up to 10 cards. The remaining cards would be deactivated from 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2006.

**Qn19: What if an errant retailer sells me a prepaid SIM card even though I am already subscribed to 10 prepaid SIM cards, or I am under 15 years of age?**

The registration of new prepaid card sales by local dealers is carried out via terminal devices. This electronic system in turns checks the number of active prepaid cards that a customer currently holds. Should the subscriber already reach the limit for active prepaid cards or if the age requirement of the

subscriber is not met, the electronic system will not allow the registration to continue.

Where a prepaid SIM card remains unregistered after being sold or where the subscribers has exceeded the prepaid card limit or where the subscriber is under the age of 15, the Service Providers, after giving due notice to such subscribers (via SMS or other suitable means) will deactivate the prepaid SIM cards.

**Qn20: How can I check how many cards I have bought? Is there a central hotline I can call to check?**

From 1 Nov 2005, all existing prepaid SIM card customers can continue to use their prepaid SIM cards if they re-register their particulars with their mobile operators by 1 May 2006. If they do not re-register by 1 May 2006, their prepaid SIM cards will be deactivated. All new prepaid SIM card customers will have to register their particulars when they purchase prepaid SIM cards.

As prepaid SIM cards are sold by different service providers, there is no centralised point that gives details on whether a person has exceeded the number of prepaid SIM cards or to find out the details of the prepaid SIM cards he has subscribed to.

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**Qn21: What if someone fraudulently uses my name to buy prepaid SIM cards, and end up preventing me from buying prepaid SIM cards?**

If a person discovers that his particulars had been used, without his permission, by someone else to register for prepaid SIM cards, he should lodge a police report for the matter to be investigated.

**Qn22: Will I be liable if my particulars have been fraudulently used for registration?**

If police investigations show that a prepaid SIM card, which was used in connection with a crime, was fraudulently registered against a person's particulars, that person would not be liable.

**OTHER QUESTIONS?**

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**Qn23: Are actual cases of prepaid SIM cards being used by terrorists Singapore?**

Yes, the Jemaah Islamiyah investigation, members exploited prepaid SIM cards to evade surveillance and detection.

**Qn24: How is my privacy protected?**

Service providers will scan the identity document of each customer using the terminal device. The terminal device can only be used to verify a user's eligibility to purchase a prepaid SIM card. **As is currently the case, subscriber details captured via the new terminal devices are strictly confidential.** The service providers will store the details of their respective customers and they are required to preserve them in accordance with existing laws. **Each service provider can only access its customers' subscriber details and not the subscriber details belonging to the other service providers.** Retailers cannot call up or extract personal information or transmit such information to others. If law enforcement agencies require subscriber details, these agencies will have to go through established legal processes.

**Qn25: Even if we control the prepaid SIM cards here, there are other prepaid SIM cards being sold overseas and which can be used in Singapore. Also, what if customers bought the prepaid SIM from the service providers' overseas outlets? Would a customer be subjected to registration? Isn't that a loophole?**

As prepaid SIM cards are sold worldwide, the measures in Singapore alone will not be 100 per cent foolproof. However, the new requirements are a start towards a more robust means of preventing the exploitation of prepaid SIM cards for criminal and terrorist activities. Some countries (e.g. Switzerland and Australia) have already taken, or are planning to take similar measures. When even more countries do the same, tighter controls over prepaid SIM cards

would help reduce the means for criminals and terrorists to carry out their illicit activities. In our case, service providers will require their overseas dealers to record the personal details of overseas customers. MHA and IDA will continue to observe the situation and review the measures to ensure that the security measures are adequate and effective.

**Qn26: How will the new requirements be enforced? Which agency or agencies will ensure that the new measures are effective? Will there be proactive checks?**

The service providers have been cooperating with IDA and MHA on setting up a practical regulatory regime. However, should any of the local cellular mobile service providers fail to comply with these registration requirements, it would amount to a breach of the licencing conditions of IDA. IDA may issue a warning, impose a financial penalty, suspend or terminate their licence.

Service Providers are responsible for ensuring that they and their dealers comply with the registration requirements. Failing which, the Service Providers are answerable to IDA for breach of the licence conditions.

**Qn27: It was mentioned that there has been exponential growth in the prepaid SIM card market. Are there any figures to demonstrate this?**

According to IDA's figures, there were 11,300 prepaid SIM card subscribers in January 1999. By Aug this year, the figure has reached over 1.4 million subscribers. This shows that the number of prepaid SIM cards has grown by more than 120 times since 6 years ago.