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## CBD threat real, say security experts

Threat of terror remains real in S'pore and office workers should not be complacent. -myp

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my paper

By Sherilyn Lim

THE threat of terror remains real in Singapore and office workers in the Central Business District should not be complacent about safety, warned security experts.

Conducting frequent emergency exercises is key, but understanding how terrorists operate may also help save lives.

Terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna, from the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, told my paper that terrorists themselves study how people react to threats.

He said: "Terrorists have developed knowledge that if there's a bomb attack or threat, the general population will assemble in a certain area."

Terrorists would then plan to bomb that particular assembly area.

Dr Gunaratna added: "One good strategy is to practise dispersal, instead of assembling at one place."

He cited the twin attacks on hotels in Jakarta last July where two bombs at the JW Marriott hotel were set to go off one after the other - first in a hotel room, and later in the lobby.

He said: "In this case, the bomb in the room didn't explode, but the bomb in the hotel lobby did and the number of fatalities and casualties was limited."

In Singapore, the Safety and Security Watch Group (SSWG) cluster in Shenton Way - made up of eight commercial stakeholders such as banks - simulated a vehicle-bomb scenario exercise in July, following up from another exercise conducted last year.

The recent exercise introduced a "drop-box" system where office workers and tenants from the various buildings in Shenton Way would place slips of paper with details of their identities into a box before evacuating the buildings.

The identity slips help to account for each staff member without them having to be physically present at an assembly area.

Through this, the risk of staff members being exposed to secondary attacks decreases.

The measure was adopted here in the wake of a bomb threat at New York City's Times Square in May, where a bomb was discovered in a car that was emitting smoke.

Dr Kumar Ramakrishna, the head of the Centre of Excellence for National Security at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, gave his take on the drills conducted here.

He said: "Based on previous overseas experiences, we know that companies which have been very serious about carrying out their emergency drills tend to perform better during an actual attack.

"We just have to ensure that the public takes these (drills) as seriously as possible."

Said Dr Gunaratna of the counter-terrorism responses here: "All such responses must be appropriate and proportionate to the threat, so the 'drop-box' system is a simple but effective method."

A large number of SSWGs in Singapore have also toughened the security of their premises, by enhancing their

closedcircuit TV (CCTV) coverage and capabilities.

While Dr Ramakrishna said that CCTVs act as an enhancement to security, Dr Gunaratna commented that, in terms of preventing an attack, they are useful only to a limited extent.

He said: "They are more effective in post-event investigations."

He added that Singapore's threat level is low to medium, as the country does not have any active terrorist networks. But he believes that it is "paramount" for Singapore to take preventive and responsive steps as terrorist networks exist in neighbouring countries.

Despite having measures in place, there may be a tendency for Singaporeans to avoid practice drills.

Mr Norman Erh, 34, who works at HSBC in the Central Business District, praised the "drop-box" system as one which does away with mass assemblies.

The vice-president of planning and finance said: "But there's always a possibility that some people will not take this seriously. They will ask their colleagues to help them throw in their identity slips, in order to stay at their desks to finish their work."

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