

How prepared are Singapore businesses in dealing with terror threats?

"Every incident out there is a lesson for us. We must take it as if a bomb has exploded in Singapore, not just that a bomb has exploded in Brussels," says the president of the Security Association in Singapore.

SINGAPORE: A new national movement to get Singaporeans ready for a possible terrorist attack will be rolled out later this year, and in the wake of the terror attacks in Brussels recently, how prepared are businesses here to deal with such situations if they arise?

Shangri-La Hotel said whether it is the hosting of major occasions or just the running of day-to-day operations, it takes a calibrated approach to security, amid heightened global threats. The hotel was the venue of the historic meeting between Chinese president Xi Jinping and Taiwanese leader Ma Ying-jeou last year.

"Typically in high-risk countries, we would scan cars; we would deploy canine bomb sniffing dogs," said the hotel's general manager and vice-president Reto Klausner. "We would have luggage scanners at the entrance, as well as walk-through metal detectors.

"I don't think that we will have to deploy such technology on a day-to-day basis at this point," he added. "We are focusing on growing the level of alertness and awareness, and we (will) try to deploy the ability to profile the guests as well as our colleagues and look for irregularities."

Shangri-La Hotel does this through a vigilance training programme for all staff. However, it is not just hotels that are stepping up security.

At Dempsey Hill, memos are distributed to tenants on the need to stay vigilant, as well as on what to do when a crisis situation arises. Security patrols have also been stepped up in the area.

However, such measures are not universal. Channel NewsAsia understands that some businesses have not taken proactive steps to beef up security. Adding to the problem is the manpower crunch in the security industry, with middle-aged and elderly men forming the bulk of the sector's manpower, said one agency.

Some security companies are also unwilling to invest in training beyond what is minimally required.

"Due to the fact that we have to perform duties at site, companies are unable to sacrifice by sending men to do prescribed training," said Mainguard Security Services' managing director Ponso Kalastree. "They have to send men only to do whatever training that is required, but the training is at the moment just the tip of the iceberg."

"If you compare our training with countries, even in the surrounding region, within Asia, our training is only one-tenth of what they've been trained (in)."

Mr Kalastree drew comparisons to the security guard training done in Philippines and Thailand, where they perform armed guard duties like their respective police forces.

"In case of any problem, any crisis, they'll be mobilised to do the job and they can perform the job just as effectively as the law enforcement (agencies)," he said. "But in our case, we have a limitation – our role is limited."

"Our guards are unarmed. We can only do the mopping up operation, (be the) eyes and ears (of the authorities) and be able to play a supporting role."

"I hope the authorities will (allow) the security companies to play a role (like that of) Cisco and AETOS," said Mr Kalastree.

While the use of CCTV systems can help ease the manpower crunch, Security Association Singapore said everyone has a part to play.

"When we leave the house, we make sure we lock the door and the gate, and we put a separate padlock on it," said president of the association Thavarajah Mogan. "You want to double, triple ensure that your place is safe."

"What about the country as a whole? How much can the Government alone do? The public will have to play its part. That is why I said the public and private security providers, as well as the Government should constantly be in tripartism as far as private security is concerned."

He added: "Every incident out there is a lesson for us. We must take it as if a bomb has exploded in Singapore, not just that a bomb has exploded in Brussels."

On its part, the association said it organises educational tours for security agencies to study areas hit by attacks. They can in turn share the lessons learnt with their clients.

- CNA/hs