

NUS team recognised for creating Web app to aid contact tracers

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As new Covid-19 cases spiked into the hundreds daily in May last year, a team from the National University of Singapore (NUS) raced against time to develop a system to help government contact tracers identify close contacts of patients.

The high volume of cases had threatened to overwhelm contact tracers, who needed to ensure those exposed to the coronavirus could be quickly identified, tested and isolated to limit further spread of Covid-19.

Despite their relative inexperience in creating such a large-scale system, the team of six current and former NUS students developed a Web application in under three weeks, with help from the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF).

The app collates data from various sources to provide contact tracers with an overview of a patient's movements and the people he or she was in close contact with.

The NUS team's efforts were recognised yesterday at the IT Leader Awards 2021 – which was themed Tech Heroes From Crisis – to pay tribute to those



Mr Zhu Hanming, 23, co-team lead of the NUS team that won the Pathfinder Team Award at the IT Leader Awards 2021.

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who made a significant impact on the community through technology during the Covid-19 crisis. The awards were organised by the Singapore Computer Society.

At the ceremony, held at Inter-Continental Singapore hotel in

Bugis, Minister for Communications and Information S. Iswaran said Singapore needs to nurture more tech heroes like those honoured.

He added that the Government is investing heavily in equipping people with digital know-how and creating good jobs for Singaporeans.

The awards yesterday also honoured the team behind the TraceTogether and SafeEntry contact-tracing systems, which were developed by the Ministry of Health, Government Technology Agency and SAF.

TIME PERIOD

Mr Zhu Hanming, 23, who was the co-team lead of the NUS team, said the team's toughest challenge was that it had little time to develop a functioning app.

"The time period we had to deploy the app and make any changes to it was overnight.

"We couldn't possibly have the contact tracers wait for us to finish deployment in the day," said the first-year computer science student.

But being able to deploy the app in June last year in under three weeks was worth the sleepless nights.

"It was incredibly fast for the scale of the application we built," said Mr Zhu.

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