

Officers from the Police Tactical Unit confronting terrorists in a simulated attack at the National University of Singapore's University Town on Feb 13. There were more than 120 participants in the annual exercise, which was also held at NUS in 2019.
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GAVIN FOO



‘Gunmen’ storm NUS campus in anti-terror drill

Exercise Heartbeat showcases efforts of various teams in test of emergency response

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A calm afternoon at the National University of Singapore (NUS) was shattered when three masked gunmen turned up in a car.

Students, unsettled by the sudden intrusion, scrambled to find cover when the gunmen sprang out of the vehicle, firing wildly.

A handful were wounded and lay bleeding on the ground.

Luckily, the chaos and confusion on the afternoon of Feb 13 were just part of a simulated attack.

Called Exercise Heartbeat, the anti-terror drill was organised by the police and the Singapore Civil

Defence Force (SCDF).

It was held at University Town, which houses residential spaces and teaching facilities, and offers a cultural environment for students and staff.

More than 120 participants, including officers from the police's Emergency Response Team (ERT), the Police Tactical Unit (PTU) of the Special Operations Command and ground response officers, took part.

Minister of State for Home Affairs Goh Pei Ming, the guest of honour, said the exercise demonstrates the strong partnership between the Home Team agencies and NUS in safeguarding institutes of higher learning against the threat of terrorism.

“Exercises like today are important as we provide avenues to put our emergency preparedness skills and knowledge into practice,” added Mr Goh, who is also Minister of State for Social and Family Development.

“And when our community is prepared, vigilant and united, we can respond swiftly and effectively to any threat and collectively keep Singapore safe and secure for you.”

That spirit was shown on Feb 13 when one of the gunmen placed an improvised explosive device in a rubbish bin and it exploded.

When the gunmen walked away from the plaza, some students stepped forward to provide aid to the victims.

Their actions highlighted key SGSecure advisories “Run, Hide, Tell” and “Press, Tie, Tell” (or improvised first aid skills) before the arrival of emergency responders.



Singapore Civil Defence Force officers helping victims. Organised by the police and SCDF, the drill reinforced SGSecure advisories like “Run, Hide, Tell”.

When the first police ground response officers arrived, they were given a quick briefing on the situation by the university's security staff.

Reinforcements came with the arrival of the ERT armed with sub-machine guns and bulletproof shields. They neutralised a gunman, who fell next to the car.

A terrorist, who took a student hostage and used him as a shield, was killed.

The final terrorist, confronted by the PTU, was handcuffed and taken away.

With the area secured, SCDF paramedics showcased their competencies.

Mr Adrian Aw, 26, was one of the

students who took part in the drill. A Year 3 computer science undergraduate, he is vice-president of the NUS Civil Defence Lionhearter Club.

“Seeing it happen in a public space like this gave me a different experience... it makes me feel like there's a chance that it could actually happen,” he said, describing his experience during the exercise.

“This event shows how... the response teams actually react to such emergencies.”

Exercise Heartbeat, which has been held annually for more than a decade, was also conducted at NUS in 2019.

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