Government to boost cyber security measures: Yaacob

Monitoring and Operations Control Centre to be established, Cyber-Watch Centre upgraded and Chief Information Security Officers appointed, Minister for Communications and Information Dr Yaacob Ibrahim announced on Tues (Aug 26).

SINGAPORE: The Infocomm Development Authority (IDA) will set up a Monitoring and Operations Control Centre to help the Government guard against, and respond swiftly, to security threats. This will complement the existing Cyber-Watch Centre, which will be upgraded by January 2015.

Following a wave of cyber security breaches, Singapore needs to ensure its security measures stay updated and can counter increasing threats, Minister for Communications and Information Dr Yaacob Ibrahim said at the Infocomm Security Seminar on Tuesday (Aug 26).

Late last year, hackers defaced certain government websites, bringing the issue of cyber security into focus. Within days, a suspect - James Raj - was arrested. He currently faces 162 charges in court.

Hacktivism is the act of hacking into a computer system or website, to convey a social or political message. This can cause disruptions to critical IT infrastructure and services, and is rated by some governments, like in the UK, as a Tier 1 national security threat. What that happens, it means hacktivists are placed on par with terrorists, criminals and hostile states.

"It's a question of how coordinated they are, and where they're funded from, because hacktivism on one hand does look a bit innocuous when it happens for the first time. But if it's a coordinated attack happening in multiple countries, and if there are adversaries behind it, and if it's well funded, then it could potentially be Tier 1," said Mr Sharat Sinha, Vice President of APAC at Palo Alto Networks.

According to network security firm FireEye, Singapore is ranked 7th in Asia Pacific by advanced persistent threat (APT) activity (42 per cent), and exceeds the current global average (35 per cent). APT is considered to be an indicator of hacking activity.

Dr Yaacob said the Cyber-Watch Centre will be upgraded to boost its detection and analytical capabilities. By January next year, the centre – established in 2007 to monitor critical public-sector IT installations – will be able to better monitor government websites and check if there are malicious activities, which could affect access to online public services, he said.

In addition, the Government will appoint Chief Information Security Officers to strengthen the infocomm security governance in Government agencies. The IDA will also be setting up a Monitoring and Operations Control Centre to guard against security threats and respond to them in a timely manner, he said.

These announcements come on the back of a spate of cyber attacks on Government websites late last year. The security breaches were also linked to other incidents, including the theft of data belonging to some 600 Standard Chartered bank customers.

MANPOWER NEEDS
There is also an increasing need to grow the pool of infocomm security experts here, Dr Yaacob said.

The biggest needs in manpower requirements will be in the areas of security operations, security engineering and technology. Other ICT professionals in areas like network engineering and application development are also needed in defending network infrastructure or applications from ever-increasing cyber threats, he added.

The Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) will be doing its part to improve cyber security expertise in Singapore, Dr Yaacob said. This includes increasing the number of cyber security professionals in Singapore at both degree and diploma levels, enhancing the skills of ICT professionals, and developing a pool of postgraduate researchers.

For instance, the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) will be launching Singapore's first undergraduate Information Security degree programme in September next year, Dr Yaacob announced. Nine other tertiary institutions offer related programmes, including Nanyang Technological University, Singapore Polytechnic, and Temasek Polytechnic.

From next year, those who wish to further their studies and carry out research in cyber security can apply for postgraduate scholarships co-developed by IDA and the National Research Foundation (NRF). This is co-developed by IDA and the National Research Foundation, and will sponsor more than 30 candidates. IDA has also launched on-the-job training and attachment programmes together with industry partners such as KPMG and OCBC, he said.

Source: Channel NewsAsia © Mediacorp Press Ltd. Reproduced with Permission