SMU puts security software to new use

Program that scans terror threats to be teaching tool in commodities course

By David Boey
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A COMPUTER program that alerts security planners to emerging threats such as terrorist attacks will be tried out as a university teaching tool - to give “early warning” on, say, food price hikes.

The Risk Assessment and Horizon Scanning (RAHS) system was started two years ago by the National Security Coordination Secretariat.

The system is being tested for its usefulness in anticipating and detecting threats to Singapore’s security.

Now, the Singapore Management University (SMU) wants to use it as a tool for its course on Agri-Commodity, which examines how commodities such as soya beans and wheat move from farms to the market.

A memorandum of understanding was signed on Oct 29 between SMU and the secretariat to allow the use of RAHS in the university.

Students will use it to help them assess the interplay of factors such as the weather, transport issues and currency rates, which can affect the prices of staple foods such as rice and wheat, the raw material for noodles and pasta.

Using flow-chart diagrams, they can also visualise how a transport strike can have a knock-on effect on grain shipments, leading to higher noodle prices.

Professor Tan Chin Tiong, SMU’s deputy president, said students will use RAHS to build computer models to learn about risk factors that commodity traders face.

It will help the students consider all angles and explore all areas “through the thinking and brainstorming process”, he said.

Mr Peter Ho, Permanent Secretary (National Security and Intelligence Coordination), felt it was a good idea to test RAHS “in different and diverse environments, going beyond issues of traditional national security concern”.

He described the tie-up with SMU as the first in an outreach programme that will include other universities, businesses and foreign partners.

“It is important that, as we extend RAHS beyond government, we also help the students at our universities and members of our business community appreciate the important principles associated with risk assessment and horizon scanning,” Mr Ho said.

SMU students Amit Agrawal, 20, and Ng Swee Shoon and Lim Yu Lun, both 23, were introduced to the system last week by security planners and engineers from the Defence Science and Technology Agency. They reckoned it would be a powerful research tool for their project.

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