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Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean speaking at the National Security Seminar on Oct 15. (Photo: National Security Coordination Centre)

SINGAPORE: Seven projects - in areas such as mobile security, digital forensics and cloud data protection - have been selected by the National Research Foundation (NRF) for further research to boost Singapore's cyber security.

Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean, who is also Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs, revealed this on Wednesday (Oct 15) at the 12th National Security Seminar.

The seven projects, initiated by various institutes of higher learning and research institutes, will get S\$42 million for research over the next two to five years. The grants are part of the NRF's National Cyber Security R&D Programme, which was set up in 2013.

DPM Teo said Singapore needs to build capabilities for the future by investing in research and development.

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"We are all also becoming increasingly dependent on cyber technologies for our daily activities, and the smooth and effective functioning of essential services. The cyber domain has thus become a lucrative target for those who aim to do harm," he said.

"These projects seek to strengthen the resilience of Singapore's cyber infrastructure and help us stay ahead of cyber threats," DPM Teo added.

The grant recipients - some of which are undertaking multiple projects - are Singapore Management University, National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), Nanyang Polytechnic as well as the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR). The projects were chosen from more than 20 proposals.

Researchers at SUTD, for instance, are designing cyber security systems to prevent cyber attacks to networks linking energy and water to homes.

"When these attackers get into the system, they can do significant damage. The damage could be something as simple as a component - a pump getting destroyed - but it could be as wide-ranging as a generator going out of control, and getting damaged, which will shut down a power plant," said Professor Aditya Mathur, head of Pillar, Information Systems Technology and Design at SUTD.

NRF TO SHARE GOVERNMENT DATA WITH RESEARCHERS

The NRF is also facilitating the sharing of Government data with researchers to help them in their work. It has also planned networking sessions so that researchers can meet parties like private companies for potential tie-ups.

Some of the research will centre on ways to strengthen mobile computing systems, applications and services and safeguard transportation systems against cyber attacks.

"If there are some good outcomes from the research, if the agencies are interested in the capabilities, they may take them to their in-house lab and develop them there, for their own use," said Mr George Loh, director of Physical Sciences and Engineering at NRF.

NRF said it will review the progress of these projects and will announce calls for such projects again, in two years' time.