

Northstar VI – The First Maritime Emergency Exercise

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▲ SPF Officers maintaining an outer cordon to deter intruders.

From far, smoke was seen billowing from the Superstar Aquarius, a cruise ship used in Exercise Northstar VI. Singapore's first maritime emergency exercise, held on 23 May 2008, challenged 12 agencies, including the Singapore Police Force, to work together to respond to the incident, evacuate and provide treatment for the 'victims' on board the cruise ship.



▲ CID officers interviewing the role-players to gather more details about the incident.



The six-hour long operation kicked off at exactly 10.00am on board the Superstar Aquarius, which was anchored 5.4km away at sea from the Marina South Pier. The Police Coast Guard (PCG) responded first to the incident. After assessing the situation and calling for reinforcements, the PCG cordoned off the incident site.

The exercise went into full swing with officers from the Singapore Civil Defence Force, the Maritime Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) and the Singapore Armed Forces joining in the rescue efforts.

A dramatic chain of events at sea and on land started to follow swiftly. While the 'victims' on the cruise ship scrambled to put on their life vests, head to the corridors of the ship and wait for rescue, fire-fighting tugs called the 'Api-Api' from the MPA moved into position to carry out 'boundary cooling' to prevent the fire from spreading to the part of the ship where the evacuation efforts were to take place. On land, medical points were set up, ready to provide further support to the rescue operations.

Once the 'victims' were extracted from the incident site, medical assistance was rendered at both the Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal and the Marina South Pier. Over at the Marina South Pier, officers from the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) were on hand to interview conscious 'victims' to obtain information on what had happened on board. The

Disaster Victim Identification team from CID was also present to assist in dealing with the 'fallen'. A makeshift mortuary, together with a temporary storage area for 'dead bodies', was also set up.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs, Mr Wong Kan Seng, was present to view the exercise and was briefed on the series of events that took place. Speaking to the media, Mr Wong said, "When it (the incident) is at sea, you have the additional challenge of distance, you have the challenge of water and you may not get your resources immediately. So the purpose of the exercise is to find out what we need to do, and to beef up our capacity." Mr Wong commented that whilst some operational details needed to be worked out, the exercise was "quite well done." *plm*



▲ The CID Forensics team at work gathering clues and evidence.

