

Homeland security spending expected to remain robust

■ BY TEH JOO LIN & JERMYN CHOW

DESPITE the economic downturn, spending in the homeland security and counter-terrorism landscape is expected to remain healthy, according to industry players who spoke ahead of a security exhibition that opens here today.

This belief has drawn 157 exhibitors to the three-day Global Security Asia (GSA), a biennial event taking place in Singapore for the third time.

On display at the Singapore Expo are the latest products and services in security screening, surveillance and sea, land and air security.

During a concurrent conference, more than 50 international speakers will discuss topics including human behaviour in crowd control and riot control, as well as the response to deadly radioactive material.

For the first time, the United States Department of Homeland Security is also attending the GSA.

At a press briefing yesterday, Mr Andrew Marriot, the managing director of GSA Exhibitions, was optimistic that countries would continue investing in homeland security.

Analysts from the Homeland Security Research Corporation predict expenditure in the Asia-Pacific to rise by 110 per cent over an eight-year period, to US\$15.8 billion (S\$24.4 billion) in 2015.

Mr Phey Teck Moh, a vice-president of government and public safety with Motorola in the Asia-Pacific, also said booking orders and sales in the sector rose last year.

Mr Adam Thomas, a senior press officer with UK Trade & Investment, said his country was not just here to showcase its

technology - it was keen to "listen and learn" from local companies too.

This year, Britain has 19 companies attending the event.

In making a pitch for Singapore firms to invest in Britain, he said: "It's a two-way street and we don't mind how wide the road is."

Local companies, such as Aridtec, are also keen to make their presence felt at the exhibition. The company, set up in November 2007, markets equipment that "harvests" potable water from water vapour in the atmosphere.

Such technology may prove useful if water sources are contaminated during a terrorist attack, for example.

While the exhibition is heavy on the latest technologies, one focus of the conference is on "human factors".

This has implications on the design of the equipment people operate and use.

And as countries arm themselves with advanced gadgets to fight terrorism, counter-terrorism analysts said the human element is also important.

Dr John Harrison, from the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at Nanyang Technological University, said: "The human mind is still needed to make sense of all the information."

"The human ultimately closes the fallibility gap that is left by technology."

The exhibition runs until Thursday.