

Biometric screening planned for key buildings

Govt working to set up biometric standards in global fight against terror

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IT IS going to get tougher for unauthorised people to enter important buildings like government ministries, once they start screening visitors at the door using biometric sensors.

Biometric technology, which can identify people through unique physical features like fingerprints or retina patterns, will be an important tool in the Government's drive to strengthen the

country's security against potential terror attacks.

Deputy Prime Minister and Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng told a conference on biometrics yesterday that the Government was crafting "a set of standards" to beef up physical security at important buildings, though it is not clear when these systems might be in place.

He said key installations are "highly attractive targets for terrorists, cyber-terrorists and hackers, as any disruption in their operations can paralyse entire governments and economies".

Using biometrics ensures only the right people get in, unlike current physical security systems, which can be beaten if a security pass is stolen or a card holder's PIN

number is compromised.

In his keynote address to some 350 participants at the conference held on Sentosa, Mr Wong said Singapore has been promoting common standards for biometric devices as part of its contribution to the global fight against terrorism.

In fact, the Republic could become an important centre for developing these standards, which need to be put in place early to avoid the development of incompatible systems by different countries.

Silicomp FIME, a France-based company that tests biometric readers, is exploring the possibility of setting up the world's first permanent laboratory in Singapore by early next year, to help the

industry work out common biometric standards.

Mr Huan Boon Kean, general manager of Silicomp Asia, the company's Singapore-based arm, said Silicomp FIME plans to spend \$2 million building the lab, which will be at the International Business Park in Jurong East.

In a nutshell, the lab will give makers of biometric devices and government agencies that issue biometric passports a one-stop shop to ensure their devices can work with one another.

Mr Huan said Singapore was chosen because the company recognises that the Government here is a "key player in the development of biometric passports".

Mr Wong said: "We need

to establish common security and biometric standards quickly. Such a project is an investment which would help restrict the space for terrorists' movements by tightening passport controls and border surveillance."

Singapore has said it intends to issue its first biometric passports, which will be virtually forge-proof, by October next year.

Companies such as France-based Oberthur Card Systems, which prints biometric passports for about 10 countries and also makes biometric identity cards, welcomed the new Silicomp lab.

Mr Cheong Chung Chin, Oberthur's president for the Asia-Pacific region, said: "Singapore has a good reputation in the biometrics industry.

"There is a great deal of integrity and objectivity in testing and people know the tests will be carried out with a rigorous and disciplined approach."

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