Skyscrapers, rain simulated at self-driving test centre

SINGAPORE: The road sweeper and a golf buggy move around the track with ease, jamming their brakes on when a pedestrian steps out and negotiating sharp turns.

Welcome to Singapore’s self-drive test centre, complete with traffic lights and mock skyscrapers, the heart of the city’s push to become a hub for autonomous technology.

However, while authorities are keen to tap a global drive by auto giants and start-ups to develop vehicles, the industry must still prove it is safe and persuade people to use the technology.

The two-hectare site has a track with sharp turns, traffic lights, a slope, and a bus stop to simulate real driving conditions.

Shipping containers are also stacked up to emulate how high rises could potentially block satellite signals to self-driving machines.

The Cetran centre, run by Nanyang Technological University, even has a rain-making machine that can simulate the frequent tropical downpours in the city-state.

“Before you are ready to go to the public roads, we test them here to see if they are actually ready,” said Niels De Boer, programme director at the centre.

All companies must put their autos through the centre’s testing and certification programmes before they are allowed to hit public roads.

The sweeper is being trialled as part of a government plan that could eventually see them deployed in the city, according to local media, while cars and buses are also being tested, and trials of delivery robots will soon take place.

Orderly Singapore is seeking to lure autonomous tech companies looking to trial their vehicles in Asia, where many other major cities are chaotic and traffic-clogged.

The government has led the drive, as it seeks to attract more foreign firms and because it sees the technology as useful for public transport and delivery services. — AFP