

## Doing more for Climate Change

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A month ago, the Singapore Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development (IMCSD) unveiled its sustainable development blueprint for the next 10-20 years. As part of the blueprint, an S\$1 Billion budget has been allocated to launch 10 key initiatives over the next 5 years. These initiatives focus on making more building energy efficient, develop more eco-friendly public housing, start clean transport technology trials, set minimum energy performance standards for household air-con and refrigerators just to name a few of them. The full report can be found at this link: <http://app.mewr.gov.sg/web/contents/ContentsSSS.aspx?ContId=1299>

Singapore started the green initiatives many years ago when Minister Mentor Lee was the Prime Minister. Back then when Singapore and her neighbours were working hard on economic development initiatives, MM Lee had a clear vision of a Garden City with good infrastructure and telecommunication that will woo investors from developed countries. In his words, "we had to make this a First World oasis in a Third World region" and he even reminded Senior Minister Goh not to turn back the clock when he passed over his PM baton to the latter.

Since then, Singapore didn't look back and while the island continues to attract substantial foreign investments and large MNCs in the manufacturing and processing industries; it has also carried out a number of green initiatives over the years. The green blueprint builds on these past initiatives. and feedback from environmental experts and the general public were also sought. While the blueprint sets some aggressive targets such as reducing energy intensity (energy consumption per GDP dollar) by 35 per cent from 2005 levels and certifying 80% of all buildings Green Mark by 2030, several environmental critics have commented that the current blueprint has missed out on making provisions for curbs on greenhouse gas emissions which is the major contributor to climate change.

According to German Watch, Singapore ranked number 38 in the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) 2009 in its climate change management efforts down from its previous 46<sup>th</sup> position in 2008 <sup>(1)</sup>. While this register a positive change, Sweden and Germany have been registering top positions in 2009 and 2008 in their efforts to fight climate change. Critics of the Singapore Green blueprint have also singled out the other areas where expectations have fallen short:

- Countries like Japan and South Korea have pledged between 2-3% of GDP costing tens of billions of dollars to invest in environmental projects whereas Singapore's S\$1 billion over the next 5 years amount to 0.3% of the country GDP. The scale of investment doesn't seem to give a positive signal to the international community of our strong commitment to stem climate change.
- While China who is contributing 20.02% of the Global Carbon Emission each, just behind the United States' 20.34%; it has taken numerous hard stand to reduce environmental impact arising from its economical growth. For instance, China has lower its energy consumption per unit of GDP by almost 4.6% in 2008 and is on target to achieve its objective of lowering its energy consumption per unit of GDP by 20% below 2005 level by 2010. In addition, between 2006 and 2008, China shut down small thermal power-generation units with a total installed capacity of 34 GW and phased out 61 million tonnes of backward steel making capacity, 43 million tonnes of iron-smelting capacity and 140 million tonnes of cement producing capacity. From 2000,

China has also move towards harnessing more alternative sources of energy such as wind power, hydropower and nuclear power.

- Australia was on track to implement the cap-and-trade scheme on Carbon Emission by Jul 2010 before the global financial market meltdown but three weeks ago, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced that Australia will delay its carbon emission cap-and-trade scheme by 1 year to 2011 in view of the economic slowdown and the impact on businesses in the event the cap-and-trade scheme is implemented next year. However, Australia will up its carbon emission reduction level to 25% instead of the previous 15% by 2020 <sup>(2)</sup>. This commitment is much welcomed by participants of the United Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen scheduled for Dec this year.
- Another point of contention is that while many nations view Singapore as a First World country, its insistence on being classified as a 'Non-Annex I' country under the Kyoto Protocol has come under pressure for some time (3).

Undoubtedly, any measures taken to reduce carbon emission would mean increase in costs for companies setting up their businesses in Singapore and this could lead to the possible exodus of these companies to countries that do not impose such restrictions or have less rigid legal framework on curbing environmental impact. However, through the years of efforts in educating the public on going green, it is in due course that employees and employers will become more conscious in understanding the implications of not taking enough efforts to go green and their social and community obligations to do otherwise. In the book "Listening to the Future – why it's everybody's business", the authors listed "mounting concerns over energy and the environment" as one of the six key driving forces that will likely shape the new world of work and business.

As Jessica Cheam, a journalist with the Straits Times puts it *"If Singapore truly wants to be a global model for sustainable development, there are some hard decisions it needs to make. It needs to be bolder, or at least more nimble, as the global conversation on climate change continues. It will need to change its position or even boost its plans in the years to come."*

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(1) The German Watch's CCPI is a joint effort by the German Watch Group and the Climate Action Network Europe with the intention to guide countries in their efforts in managing climate change by highlighting their strengths and weaknesses in their respective national development efforts to fight climate change.

(2) Originally, Australia sets its carbon emissions-cutting target at 15% below 2000 levels by 2020 but due to the delay of 1 year in implementing the carbon emission reduction through the cap-and-trade scheme, Australia decided to increase this target to 25%. This revision in reduction target will at least put Australia in a better negotiating position when it attends the Copenhagen talk in Dec 2009.

(3) Non-Annex I nations are typically developing countries and do not have to cut emissions by 5 per cent from their 1990 levels by 2012. This is a target which 'Annex I' or developed countries need to adhere to.

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