The Straits Times (Singapore)  
  
                           December 31, 2007 Monday  
  
Business of going green burns bright;  
As climate change moved from being a fringe issue to a mainstream concern, 2007  
will be remembered as the year of the environment. With the green business  
becoming the world's fastest-growing industry, JESSICA CHEAM looks at the  
milestones in Singapore for the year  
  
LENGTH: 1182 words  
  
**Clean energy blueprint**  
  
IN MARCH, Singapore heralded its entry into the clean energy race as Prime  
Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced a $170 million research fund for the  
industry.  
  
  
The Economic Development Board (EDB) soon unveiled a more detailed $350 million  
blueprint - for research and development, testing and pilot projects in clean  
energy.  
  
  
The aim: To create a major industry worth $1.7 billion which will employ 7,000  
people by 2015.  
  
  
Singapore's foray into clean energy - that is, energy generated from renewable  
sources such as the sun and wind - comes just as the global clean energy market  
is enjoying massive growth.  
  
  
Leading research house Clean Edge has reported revenues in the industry climbing  
from $40US billion ($58S billion) in 2005 to $55US billion last year. This is  
projected to hit $226US billion by 2016.  
  
  
Mega green investments  
  
  
IN OCTOBER, Singapore was propelled into global limelight when Norwegian solar  
firm Renewable Energy Corporation (REC) announced that it will set up the  
world's biggest solar equipment manufacturing plant here, worth $6.3 billion.  
  
  
This was the fruit of 'nine months of intense courtship' between EDB and REC.  
Singapore trumped more than 200 locations to emerge with the prize, said EDB  
managing director Ko Kheng Hwa.  
  
  
The Tuas plant, which will begin operations in 2010, is expected to employ up to  
3,000 staff - with an initial 1,500 selected to be hired next year. A good  
number of these will be sent to Norway for extensive training.  
  
  
Earlier this month, oil giant Neste Oil said that it would build the world's  
biggest biodiesel facility in Singapore at a cost of 550 million euros ($1S.17  
billion).  
  
  
The plant, ideally located near Indonesia and Malaysia - the world's two largest  
palm oil producers - will convert the feedstock into fuel for vehicles. The  
investment will create 100 jobs and boost the Republic's goal of expanding its  
environmentally-friendly industries.  
  
  
Environmentally-friendly policies  
  
  
TO REALISE Singapore's ambition of becoming a major clean energy player, a Clean  
Energy Programme Office (Cepo) was announced in March to drive the growth of the  
sector.  
  
  
Cepo comprises six government agencies, including the EDB, the National  
Environment Agency (NEA) and the Building and Construction Authority (BCA).  
  
  
Its first initiative was to set aside a $17 million kitty for the Clean Energy  
Research and Testbedding (Cert) programme, which will provide sites for foreign  
and local companies to test all kinds of clean technology.  
  
  
In October, Cepo launched a $50 million research fund for the next five years to  
accelerate the industry's research and development efforts. This was soon  
followed by a $25 million scholarship programme to groom a workforce to serve  
this industry. Cepo plans to award master's or PhD scholarships to about 130  
students over the next five years.  
  
  
The NEA also launched an Energy Efficiency Programme Office (E2PO) to coordinate  
nationwide efforts to streamline Singapore's major sectors of energy use, namely  
in power generation, industry, transportation, buildings and households.  
  
  
A world-class research centre that will focus on environmental issues - the  
first of its kind in Singapore - is also likely to be set up soon. It will  
likely to be called the Singapore-ETH Centre for Global Environmental  
Sustainability.  
  
  
The research house will be a partnership between the National Research  
Foundation in Singapore and a top European group of research and teaching  
institutes from Switzerland, ETH Domain.  
  
  
Carbon: a new commodity  
  
  
WITH the Kyoto Protocol creating a new market commodity in carbon, Singapore is  
positioning itself to become the region's carbon trading hub given its standing  
as a financial services capital.  
  
  
A local company - Asia Carbon Group - said last month that it was working with  
the Singapore Exchange to launch a potentially lucrative carbon credit trading  
facility.  
  
  
Catalist-listed ecoWise Holdings, a local environmental solutions company, also  
signed a deal this year with Japanese firm Kansai Electric Power to sell up to  
95,000 carbon credits over five years - making it likely to be the first company  
in Singapore to sell carbon credits under the United Nations' Clean Development  
Mechanism.  
  
  
The trading carbon credits is designed to limit industry carbon dioxide  
emissions, widely blamed as a contributor to global warming.  
  
  
Solar: Option with most potential  
  
  
THE solar industry has been the rising star of Singapore's burgeoning clean  
energy sector this year - and looks set to remain so in the near term.  
  
  
The Government has singled out solar as the clean energy with the most potential  
for Singapore due to its existing strength in the similar semiconductor  
industry, and its strategic location among the sun-belt countries.  
  
  
Big players such as Norway's REC, German solar firm Conergy, United States-based  
SolarWorld have been courted to set up manufacuturing facilities or regional  
offices in Singapore; while local companies such as Solar Energy Power made  
history by becoming the first Singapore company to manufacture solar cells this  
year.  
  
  
Cepo has also called for proposals from firms to test a range of solar  
technologies at selected sites.  
  
  
BCA last month unveiled a $10 million zero-energy building - Singapore's first -  
which will also have such test facilities.  
  
  
The complex will have a net zero energy consumption over a typical year, made  
possible by a massive array of solar panels covering about 1,300 sq m - the  
biggest in Singapore - which will be integrated on the roof of one of the  
buildings.  
  
  
BCA expects different generations of solar technology to be tested here, paving  
the way for further innovations and adoptions of solar energy in Singapore.  
  
  
The greening of corporate S'pore  
  
  
THIS year, chief executives have found that environmental issues, once an  
afterthought, are now key to any corporate strategy.  
  
  
Firms, foreign and local alike, have been jumping on the green bandwagon,  
initiating numerous 'corporate social responsibility' practices from funding  
environmental groups to streamlining their operations.  
  
  
Those with genuine intentions have often found recognition for their efforts.  
  
  
In April, for example, property firm City Developments (CDL) became the first  
private developer to be awarded BCA's Green Mark Platinum - the highest accolade  
for green buildings - for its Oceanfront@Sentosa Cove project.  
  
  
CDL's reputation and experience as a green developer also in some way led to its  
clinching of a 3.5ha prestigious site at Beach Road from the Urban Redevelopment  
Authority in September, which features an eco- friendly mega mixed development.  
  
  
The number of local companies joining the race for environmental solutions have  
also swelled, with more diversifying into the green business.  
  
  
For retail investors, 2007 is also the year green investment funds went  
mainstream.  
  
  
Former US vice-president and environmental crusader Al Gore, who came to  
Singapore in August for the Global Brand Forum, gave a separate talk on the  
growing range of green investments in the market that could give high returns  
and urged investors to 'put your money where your values are'.  
  
  
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