

Minister rallies Singapore to rise to existential climate challenge

By Michelle Quah
michquah@sph.com.sg
@MichelleQuahBT

Singapore

THE role Singapore plays in the critical need for global climate action will come about only through the collective efforts of all segments of its community; its businesses and corporations, in particular, will need to transform and make sustainability not just a core pillar of their operations, but a competitive advantage.

This was the thrust of the message put forth by Minister for Sustainability and the Environment (MSE) Grace Fu on Tuesday, in a rallying call to bring the nation together to address climate change.

She was speaking at a webinar organised by the MSE and the Centre for Climate Research Singapore (CCRS), which discussed the dire warnings issued recently by the United Nations' climate panel and its impact on Singapore.

In its report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had called for immediate, rapid and large-scale action to bring down greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and said that the world was dangerously close to runaway warming. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had termed the report a "code red for humanity".

Recognising the urgency, Ms Fu said Singapore must press on with its efforts in climate mitigation by curbing carbon emissions, and that strengthening its national resilience would help the country better adapt to climate change.

Singapore is pursuing three key strategies to decarbonise, she said. First, it is transforming its industry, economy and society to be more energy- and carbon-efficient, and adopting more renewable energy.

Ms Fu said: "To drive carbon emissions reduction across the economy, Singapore introduced a carbon tax in 2019, the first in South-east Asia to do so. The government is reviewing the tax trajectory and level, post-2023."

Its second strategy is to invest in and draw on low-carbon technologies, such as carbon capture, utilisation and storage, and low-carbon hydrogen.

Thirdly, it will work with global counterparts in its efforts.

"Our plans are not static, and we will continue to raise our climate ambitions as more options for emissions reductions emerge," Ms Fu said.

She added that Singapore has to first understand what the IPCC findings mean in terms of local weather patterns in Singapore. To that end, the CCRS has begun the Third National Climate Change Study to derive local climate projections based on global IPCC models. It is expected to complete the study by the end of next year.

Reiterating elements of the Singapore Green Plan, Ms Fu touched on the country's development of a heat mitigation plan, which includes increasing the use of urban greenery and green buildings, scaling up the use of cool materials and its coastal protection plans.

She stressed: "The government cannot tackle climate change alone." She emphasised the need for the entire nation, including its businesses and corporations, "to collectively rise to this existential challenge". "By working together on climate action, we can strengthen our climate resilience and with that, our national resilience."

In addition to its scientists, community, youth, non-governmental organisations and individuals playing their part, "we will need our businesses to transform, and make sustainability not just a core pillar of their operations but a competitive advantage, being more energy- and carbon-efficient and pursuing sustainable production".

Her point was picked up in a panel discussion later in the event.

Associate Professor Winston Chow from the School of Social Sciences at the Singapore Management University said: "Businesses have an outsized influence in climate action, and what they do goes beyond the borders of Singapore. Being cognisant of what the risks are can be one way that Singapore can punch above its weight, beyond its territorial borders, for climate action."

Zhang Weijie, director of Energy and Climate Policy in MSE, said the government has been looking, not just at government-owned offices but also government-funded infrastructure and span of operations "to see how to best embed the mindset of sustainability in our core business areas and in our people that constitute the public service and the people we work with".

"It's important that organisations similarly take that step to internalise what climate change and sustainability mean for them and their operations," he said.