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Making S'pore a green building hub

New council to boost green construction; deal with UN unit to promote best practices

SINGAPORE took two major steps yesterday in its drive to position itself at the forefront of the increasingly vital field of "green" construction practices and technologies. A Singapore Green Building Council (SGBC) has been set up to promote sustainable construction. This includes driving efforts to green at least 80 per cent of buildings here by 2030. And the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations Environment Programme to collaborate on promoting best building practices across Asia. The move fits in with the Government's aim to set up a Centre of Excellence in sustainable building and construction in the future to cement Singapore's ambition to be the green building hub of the tropics. Details will be released later, said the BCA. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Teo Chee Hean announced the new council at the opening ceremony of the inaugural three-day International Green Building Conference held at Suntec convention centre yesterday. Mr Teo noted that even as the world tackles the global economic downturn, "we are faced with a policy imperative... that of ensuring sustainable development for our current generation, so that our future generations will have a future". Economic growth can go hand in hand with environmental sustainability, but the right structures have to be put in place to encourage sustainable growth, he added. The minister cited the example of retrofitting existing buildings. This can be a growth area where investments in new technology will bring benefits such as green jobs, reducing energy use and increasing savings for building owners and occupiers. Greening existing buildings in Singapore is the most immediate challenge for the local industry. The target of 80 per cent of buildings achieving a minimum Green Mark standard – a building rating system – by 2030 was outlined earlier in April. A \$600 million incentive fund has been set aside by the Government to spur owners into making the changes. The new council, which is made up of industry members, will also play a key role. Its first task is to set up a directory of green products for the building industry and a certification system in the next 12 months, said its president, Mr Lee Chuan Seng. Funds have been raised from founding members and the Government to carry out its work, but its greatest challenge will be getting building owners to adopt green practices early, said Mr Lee. National Development Minister Mah Bow Tan, who was also at yesterday's event, is the council's patron. The World Green Building Council awarded the SGBC "emerging status", with full status likely in a few months. Mr Tony Arnel, chair of the world body, commended the local industry for its speed in embracing green construction: "There's a lot of momentum in the

Asia-Pacific region for green buildings at the moment, and there are a lot of low-hanging fruits for energy efficiency in existing buildings across the region." The conference attracted 1,000 delegates from 23 countries. jcheam@sph.com.sg

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