

Singapore, Australia sign landmark pact on green economy

Plans include zero-emission sea routes, lower tariffs for green goods, promoting research

Lim Min Zhang
Assistant News Editor

CANBERRA – Singapore and Australia are set to intensify cooperation in the green economy, targeting new areas such as sustainable agriculture and green shipping corridors, with the signing of a trailblazing agreement on Tuesday.

Under the Singapore-Australia Green Economy Agreement, both countries will embark on 17 joint initiatives for a start, such as developing a list of environmental goods and services with an eye to reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers. It will reduce hurdles to cross-border trade in clean energy, for instance.

Other highlights include a partnership to promote business engagements in trade and investment in green sectors, and research collaboration in areas such

as alternative proteins and lithium battery recycling.

The signing, witnessed by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese, was the key outcome of the 7th Singapore-Australia Leaders' Meeting held in Canberra on Tuesday.

Speaking at a press conference after the meeting, PM Lee said the agreement will support the transition of both countries to net-zero emissions, and boost growth and create jobs in the green sectors.

"It's the first such agreement of its kind between countries, and we hope that it will be a pathfinder for other countries similarly to cooperate with one another to deal with what's a global problem," he said.

Trade and Industry Minister Gan Kim Yong and Australian Minister for Trade and Tourism Don Farrell signed the agreement at the Parliament House after a delegation

meeting on Tuesday.

Negotiations for the agreement started in September 2021, after it was first mooted at the leaders' meeting in June that year.

It sets out seven areas of cooperation: trade and investment; standards and conformance; green and transition finance; carbon markets; clean energy, decarbonisation and technology; skills and capabilities; and business engagements and partnerships.

Australia and Singapore have developed a list of 372 environmental goods and 155 environmental services, which is non-exhaustive and will be reviewed periodically, said the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment.

They also agreed to set up joint working groups for electricity trade

and aviation environmental cooperation, as well as to establish a forum for government experts to discuss the skills needed for green jobs.

Other initiatives include building partnerships to advance green shipping corridors, which are zero-emission sea routes between ports.

Asked if Singapore was eyeing similar green agreements with other countries, PM Lee said the hope is that other countries would be encouraged to consider whether they could work with Singapore, or with one another, to enhance cooperation on green issues.

Mr Albanese said that with climate change being a global problem that needs global solutions, agreements such as this one between Australia and Singapore – "two great friends" – were important as an example for the world.

The agreement signals a "collective resolve to confront challenges as we transition our economies to net zero", he said. "It will support clean energy innovation, unlock business opportunities and create jobs, and help deliver our emissions targets while positioning Australia as a renewable energy superpower," he added.

The meeting wraps up a three-day visit by the Singapore delegation to Australia that began on Sunday.

Earlier on Tuesday, PM Lee laid a wreath at the Australian War Memorial, which commemorates Australians who were killed in war, including those who defended Singapore in WWII.

Besides reaffirming their excellent bilateral relations, the two prime ministers also discussed

SHOWING THE WAY

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PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG, on the Singapore-Australia Green Economy Agreement.



Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese at the joint press conference at the Parliament House in Canberra on Tuesday.

ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

new areas of cooperation, such as in strengthening the resilience of supply chains, and exchanged views on global and regional developments.

Separately, to deepen cooperation in science and innovation, the National University of Singapore and the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation signed an agreement to give Singapore researchers preferred access to the Australian Synchrotron, a research facility in Melbourne.

Alongside the agreement, a \$16 million programme was launched to promote synchrotron research in Singapore, called the National Synchrotron Programme.

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SEE THE BIG STORY • A4

S'pore, Australia set up working group to strengthen supply chains

Group will look into facilitating flow of critical goods, especially amid crises

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As trusted and reliable partners of each other, Singapore and Australia are looking at new strategic areas to cooperate in, such as strengthening mutual supply chains.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said in Canberra on Tuesday that a bilateral working group, formed in September, is looking into facilitating the flow of critical goods between the two countries, particularly in times of crisis.

The two countries are seeking out new areas to work together "because we are natural partners which have similar views on many issues, and trusted and reliable partners of each other", said PM Lee at the Parliament House, after a meeting with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

Both countries are looking at strengthening the security and resilience of their supply chains, including on food and energy, and connectivity to the rest of the world, PM Lee added.

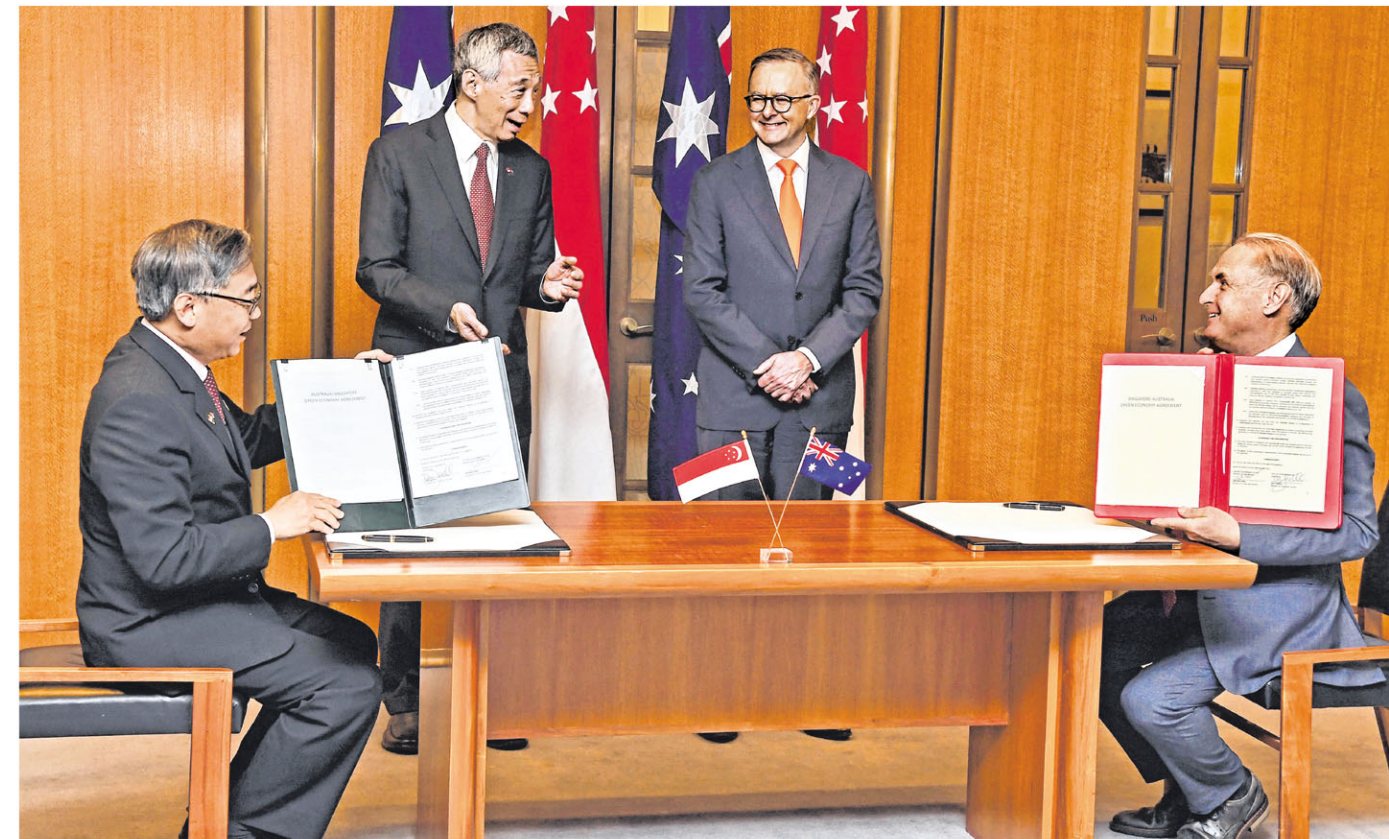
He was speaking at a press conference after the 7th Singapore-Australia Leaders' Meeting with Mr Albanese.

He was on a three-day visit to Australia that started on Sunday.

Asked how Singapore and Australia are seeking to maintain security and cooperation in supply chains amid increasing geopolitical instability, he said that while countries are going for self-resilience, it is not possible to be self-sufficient. "We're too interdependent," he added.

"You may produce a lot of minerals, you may have a lot of talent, but the world is a big place, and you need to work with and develop partnerships with other countries."

While countries seek to do busi-



Singapore Trade and Industry Minister Gan Kim Yong and Australian Trade and Tourism Minister Don Farrell with the Singapore-Australia Green Economy Agreement that they signed at the Parliament House in Canberra on Tuesday. With them at the signing were Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese. PM Lee was on a three-day visit to Australia that started on Sunday. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

ness with everyone, they can do more with partners with whom they have a deep, established relationship of trust and confidence.

This is the case for Singapore and Australia, and both sides are working to deepen this reservoir of trust and confidence, he said.

"We have a working group working on supply chain resilience and cooperation, and I hope they will come up with some substantive proposals," added PM Lee.

The joint working group was formed after a July meeting in Singapore between Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan and his Australian counterpart Penny Wong, where they agreed to explore how supply chains that will "withstand the test of future crises" can be built.

At the press conference, Mr Albanese thanked PM Lee and Singapore for the critical role that the city state played in supporting Australia through the Covid-19 pandemic, "both by air and by sea".

"Along with personal protective equipment, along with ventilators, Singapore played such a critical role," he said. "Singapore is a reliable economic partner. It is a great trading nation."

In a joint statement after Tuesday's annual meeting, the prime ministers also agreed to begin work on a bilateral food pact.

This is to enhance supply chain resilience and increase trade and investments in both countries' food supply.

Asked about United States President Joe Biden's recent decision to

curb the supply of advanced American semiconductors to China, PM Lee said the move was a very serious one that could have wide ramifications.

"We do worry that valid national security considerations may trigger off further consequences and may result in less economic cooperation, less interdependency, less trust, and possibly, ultimately, a less stable world," he added.

PM Lee was also asked about China joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP, a free trade agreement between 11 Asia-Pacific countries – including Singapore and Australia – that was signed and entered into force in 2018.

China submitted a formal appli-

cation in September 2021 to join the trade pact.

"It's good if China is able to join the CPTPP. They will of course have to meet the requirements fully, the conditions and obligations, but I think that's something which is possible and can be negotiated," said PM Lee.

But there has to be a consensus among all existing members for China to join, he added.

Singapore is chairing the CPTPP committee this year, and has been canvassing views from the pact's participants on whether the process should begin.

"I don't think there's a consensus yet, but we'll continue the process," said PM Lee.

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5 initiatives under green trade deal

1 SETTING STANDARDS

Singapore and Australia will look at bilateral and international cooperation on standards and technical regulations, among other things, for the green economy. This aims to cut compliance costs for exporters of environmental goods.

2 BUSINESS ENGAGEMENTS

Agencies from the two countries will promote and facilitate business-to-business engagements to expand bilateral trade and investments in green economy sectors. Activities include business missions, joint webinars and seminars, and joint promotion of green economy events.

3 EXPERT DISCUSSIONS

An Australia-Singapore Green Skills Roundtable will be established for experts from government agencies to discuss how to identify and assess core skills and competencies needed for workers to take on jobs in the green economy.

4 PROMOTING RESEARCH

Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and its Singapore counterpart, the Agency for Science, Technology and Research, agreed to promote bilateral research and development in the areas of circular economy and low-emissions technologies, food, digital environment and materials in manufacturing.

5 ECO-LABELLING

Under an agreement between the Singapore Environment Council and Good Environmental Choice Australia, more dialogue and partnerships between eco-label schemes of both countries will be facilitated to promote global best practices and standards.