

Sri Lankan President's Visit to Singapore: Climate Adaptation for Small Maritime Nations

Rajni Gamage and Amila Prasanga

Summary

In August 2023, Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe made an official visit to Singapore. Bilateral discussions were centred around a memorandum of understanding on carbon credits. These efforts signal the increasing importance of climate-related initiatives and maritime security in diplomatic and bilateral relations.

Introduction

Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe met with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, President Halimah Yacob and other high-level state officials during his visit to Singapore from 21 to 22 August 2023. Bilateral talks were centred on [strengthening](#) trade, food security, renewable energy and regional economic cooperation. A key agreement [signed](#) during the visit was a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on carbon credits collaboration under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. This includes, among other aspects, an exchange of best practices on carbon credits, identification of mutually beneficial projects, and potential avenues for collaboration in carbon markets with third countries.

Singapore's Permanent Secretary (Development) at the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Dr Beh Swan Gin, [stated](#) that, "This MoU enables both countries to make progress on our respective climate targets while...creating new jobs in the green economy and enhancing biodiversity protection." The MoU sets up a bilateral framework for the international transfer of correspondingly adjusted carbon credits. What this looks like in practice, [for example](#), is carbon tax-liable companies in Singapore being able to purchase carbon credits from eligible projects to offset up to five per cent of their taxable emissions. It can also [involve](#) compliant mitigation activities that enable both countries to achieve their respective nationally determined contributions.

Climate Diplomacy

Climate diplomacy recognises a strong role for foreign policy in international climate policy. It emphasises the need to integrate climate objectives at the highest diplomatic level and across all policy areas.

For Singapore, its long-term Low Emissions Development Strategy aims to halve emissions to 33 MtCO₂e by 2050, with a view to achieving net-zero emissions in the second half of the century. In 2022, a list of acceptable international carbon credits that are eligible to offset Singapore companies' taxable carbon emissions was [published](#). Besides Sri Lanka, Singapore has signed MoUs on carbon credits collaboration with 12 other countries.

For Sri Lanka, Wickremesinghe's commitment to climate action has been explicit, even as he assumed office during a major economic crisis. In June 2023, it was [reported](#) that Wickremesinghe was leading efforts to establish the Climate Change University, which is scheduled to be launched next year in Sri Lanka. Universities such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard were said to have expressed interest in collaborating with this education body.

In October 2022, Sri Lanka and Japan [signed](#) a memorandum of cooperation on Japan's Joint Crediting Mechanism for a low-carbon growth partnership. In February 2023, Sri Lanka [signed](#) an agreement with the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI). The GGGI [recognises](#) that addressing the present energy and economic challenges, including debt, is important and has offered its support to the Sri Lankan government to accelerate green growth, achieve net zero emissions and increase the country's climate resilience.

Challenges Faced by Small Maritime Nations

During the bilateral discussions, geopolitical developments and the importance of regional stability for small maritime countries were [discussed](#). Being one of the most significant ports in maritime trade and situated in low-lying geography, maritime security is key to and closely interlinked with the city-state's efforts at climate resilience and readiness. Singapore, therefore, positions itself as a proactive regional actor in addressing climate-induced vulnerabilities.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka contends with a diverse array of maritime security challenges. These encompass illegal fishing, drug trafficking, human smuggling and transnational organised crime. The island nation's maritime domain vulnerability is exacerbated by its position along the major global shipping routes.

The [Sri Lanka Navy](#) undertakes proactive measures to address these maritime threats. It has intensified naval patrols and surveillance operations to monitor and deter illicit activities, with an emphasis on strengthening [maritime domain awareness](#). Collaborative endeavours with neighbouring countries, regional organisations and international partners have also been instrumental in sharing intelligence and coordinating joint operations to [combat maritime crimes](#).

On coastal resilience, rising sea levels, coastal erosion and extreme weather events, due to climate change, are key challenges. The Sri Lanka Navy has embarked on strategic initiatives to enhance coastal resilience, collaborating with governmental agencies, research institutions and local communities. One significant approach involves the restoration of the [mangrove ecosystems](#) along vulnerable coastlines, acting as natural barriers against erosion and storm surges.

Moreover, the Sri Lanka Navy is engaged in awareness campaigns aimed at educating coastal communities about climate-induced vulnerabilities and encouraging the adoption of resilient practices. These efforts align with international frameworks like the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals, showcasing Sri Lanka's commitment to fostering [sustainable coastal ecosystems](#).

Both Singapore and Sri Lanka's climate-related challenges are complex and necessitate bilateral and regional responses. The recent MoU on carbon credits collaboration between Sri Lanka and Singapore is a positive step in this regard. Proactive and collaborative action on climate-related issues should not come secondary to measures taken to mitigate economic crises, as the climate and economy are closely intertwined and mutually impact one another.

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Dr Rajni Gamage is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), an autonomous research institute at the National University of Singapore (NUS). She can be contacted at r.gamage@nus.edu.sg. Mr Amila Prasanga is a Commander in the Sri Lanka Navy. The opinions expressed are his own and not necessarily reflective of the Sri Lanka Navy. He can be contacted at apa.prasanga@gmail.com. The authors bear full responsibility for the facts cited and opinions expressed in this paper.