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## Singapore and Colombo collaborate on rejuvenating Beira Lake



Beira Lake in Colombo, Sri Lanka. PHOTO: CENTRE FOR LIVEABLE CITIES

**Elgin Toh**

COLOMBO • One area of strong collaboration between Singapore and Sri Lanka is in the rejuvenation of the Beira Lake district in Colombo.

The Singapore government think-tank Centre for Liveable Cities (CLC) conducted workshops to help Sri Lanka officials form an action plan to clean up the lake and to redevelop surrounding areas.

"Beira Lake is a polluted lake in the heart of Colombo city. So, we saw the similarities with the Singapore River, which was also polluted until the 1970s, when Mr Lee Kuan Yew set civil servants the task of cleaning it up in 10 years," CLC executive director Khoo Teng Chye said.

Sponsored by Temasek Foundation, the six workshops - five in Sri Lanka and one in Singapore - were attended by 200 Sri Lankan officials from 19 government agencies.

The workshops ended last year. An action plan was presented to Minister of Megapolis and Western Development Champika Ranawaka.

The plan is now being implemented. As was the case with the Singapore River clean-up, illegal settlements around the lake have to be cleared as they are a source of pollution. The Sri Lanka government has recently moved these residents into public housing elsewhere.



Ms Priyani Nawaratne, deputy director of the Urban Development Authority in Colombo, attended the workshops. Her key takeaway was how Singapore kept its city centre vibrant by eliminating pollution and making it attractive to locals and tourists, as well as to investors who want to develop it.

The action plan from the workshops is now "one of the priority projects of the government", she said. The next step is to have a masterplan and to ensure development takes place in an orderly way.

Since Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesingha - an admirer of Singapore's progress - came to office in 2015, Sri Lanka has sent hundreds of officials to Singapore on training programmes and study trips.

Those at CLC's workshops were serious-minded officials who felt the urgency to rebuild their city and their economy after many years of civil war, said Mr Khoo. "We could sense that they wanted to accomplish something," he said. "They were also professional. They knew what they were talking about."

The workshops strengthened ties between officials of the two countries, and can create goodwill for Singapore companies, he added.

One Singapore firm, Next Story Group, has taken advantage of Beira Lake's rejuvenation to build, along with a local joint-venture partner, a 47-floor development with a hotel and a mall by the lake.

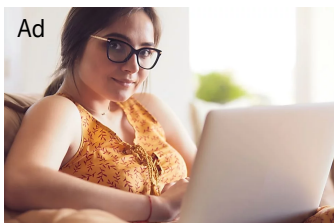
For Beira Lake's rejuvenation to succeed, there must be political will to require agencies to collaborate - as in the case of Singapore River and Marina Bay, said Mr Khoo.

"If you don't have coordination, and one agency says, 'This is not my priority, I have got something else more important to do,' then nothing will happen," he said. "We told them this story to signal to them that at the end of the day, you need the political leadership to bring the agencies together. It looks like they do have that political leadership."

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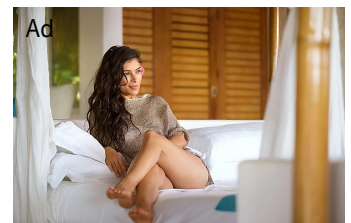
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