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Growing allure of 'green-collar' jobs

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WITH jobs in the financial and other sectors becoming scarce, graduating students are eyeing "green-collar" jobs - those in the field of preserving the environment.

A mini fair at the National University of Singapore last week to showcase careers in renewable energy featured just seven companies in businesses ranging from solar power to biofuels, but pulled in about 100 students.

The fair, held as part of the Asian Youth Energy Summit youth conference last week, offered careers in solar energy and biofuels, designing and constructing energy-efficient buildings, and in traditional energy companies like PowerSeraya which are seeking to go green.

Most of the 21 students who spoke to The Straits Times were final-year undergraduates or masters-level students in engineering, looking to land green-collar jobs next year.

Fourth-year economics student Vince Lim and two classmates were at the fair, drawn by concerns that the finance and banking jobs eyed by economics majors were drying up.

Mr Lim, 23, said: "I'm still considering finance, but it's always good to keep my options open."

Fourth-year chemical engineering student Vincent Chan, 23, said job prospects in the field of renewable energy were buoyant because of the Government's push for it.

Singapore has set aside \$350 million to develop itself into a global clean-energy centre, and international companies have responded.

Last Friday, Norwegian solar-power behemoth Renewable Energy Corporation broke ground on a \$3 billion plant here that will manufacture solar wafers, cells and modules.

And yesterday, Denmark's Vestas, one of the biggest wind-power system manufacturers worldwide, said it would set up a \$500 million research centre here.

Home-grown biodiesel company Alpha Synovate, which had a booth at the NUS fair, said renewables were a long-term growth industry and that it was looking for more than just engineering talent.

Its chief executive and founder Allan Lim said that he was seeing three kinds of job seekers: those who wanted to catch the green-tech wave; those with real interest in sustainable energy; and those nudged towards green energy by the current market conditions.

PowerSeraya, which also had a booth at the fair, said it was still looking to hire as it moved towards integrated and cleaner energy. Mrs Retnam Pui Yin, its vice-president of corporate services, added that it was, however, too early to tell if the downturn had led to more applicants.

Ms Annie Yap, the chief executive of human resource consultants and service provider GMP Recruitment Services, said the outlook for green jobs could be brighter than for traditional manufacturing.

“As more countries are expected to conform to stricter standards of carbon emissions and pollution, the market for green technology has growth prospects from its current state of infancy,” she said.