

PM: WE'LL DO OUR BEST TO ACHIEVE SDGs

Malaysia has met its commitment to forest cover, says Dr Mahathir

NEW YORK

MALAYSIA seeks to accomplish all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ratified by the United Nations, while balancing the needs and wellbeing of its people, said Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"To a certain extent, we have achieved (some of the goals) and we need to do more.

"But Malaysia must continue to develop, and the people need development and good infrastructure.

"Good infrastructure sometimes will cause loss of land and impact the environment. When we need to build lakes and dams, we will be forced to cut down trees," he said at the SDG Summit Leaders Dialogue here on Wednesday.

In 2015, the UN adopted the 2030 Agenda, which provides a blueprint for the transition to a healthier planet and a more just world.

The agenda contains 17 SDGs, including to end poverty and hunger; expand access to health, education, justice and jobs; and, protect the planet from environmental degradation.

On poverty, Dr Mahathir said over time, the economy grew and what was regarded as "above the poverty line" now became "below the poverty line".

"Because of the high cost of living and other factors, the poverty level is much higher than the original poverty line that we drew in the beginning," he said, adding



LOKMAN MANSOR

that this would go on for years to come.

"As a country grows and becomes richer, the poverty line also reaches a higher level.

"We still have poverty in our country. I doubt if it is possible to eradicate poverty, but we will try."

He said when the population grew, the amount of waste produced kept growing and the government had to spend more money to address the problem.

"It is unfair for some rich countries, for example, to send their waste to poor countries because

it costs us a lot of money to get rid of it," he said, adding that plastic was difficult to dispose of.

"As we grow bigger and richer, we produce more waste than ever before, and treating waste is something that will leave us unable to fulfil our desire to have sustainable development.

"This is going to be with us for a long time."

He said Malaysia had met its commitment to forest cover, with 53 to 55 per cent of the country's land area covered by forests.

"The world expects carbon dioxide produced to be absorbed by forests in Malaysia and elsewhere.

"We will try to sustain our forests for as long as possible. Nevertheless, we will need land over time for human settlement.

"We cannot say that we will keep people from living in good

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TUN DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD
Prime minister



houses because we have no space for them," Dr Mahathir said, in an off-the-cuff speech seasoned with a pinch of sarcasm.

Food supply required land use, he said, citing alternative modern farming techniques that included growing vegetables on tiers of buildings and in pots "so they don't occupy too much space".

To reduce air pollution from petrol-driven vehicles, he said Malaysia planned to have more hybrid and electric cars.

Electricity generation would avoid using nuclear power to minimise the impact on the environment.

"We don't think we know enough about nuclear material at this time. We know how to activate materials (like uranium), but not how to reverse the process so that they become harmless."

He said nuclear waste needed to be buried deep enough underground so that the radiation, which could last up to a million years, would not affect the people.

For the record, the United States is the world's largest nuclear electricity producer.

American vehicles, meanwhile, have the second highest average fuel consumption and carbon dioxide emissions per kilometre driven.

Dr Mahathir said: "Malaysia will try its best to achieve the sustainable goals, although we have a need to do things which may cause problems for the environment.

"But we will try our best to achieve them."