

PM: Green focus still needed

Environment is not spared by pandemic, says Muhyiddin

By HEMANANTHANI
SIVANANDAM
hemananthani@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and new norms have added new environmental issues that require a concerted effort from all stakeholders to improve and facilitate sustainable living, says Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin (pic).

The Prime Minister said over the past year, the world experienced unprecedented social, economic and environmental impacts due to the pandemic.

He noted that according to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Report 2020, the pandemic had caused further disruptions to progress, which was already "off-track" by the end of 2019.

"The pandemic has provided brief reliefs with clearer skies and cleaner air, especially during the movement control order.

"Similarly, global lockdowns have given respite to the environment as industrial activities were reduced.

"But at the same time, new norms have added a new set of environmental issues such as the wanton disposal of face masks and

the heavy use of plastics for takeaways.

"Due to such activities, environmental initiatives took a backseat. So, the challenge now is to restore economic activities without reactivating environmental degradation," he said in his keynote address during the virtual presentation ceremony of the Prime Minister's Hibiscus Awards yesterday.

Muhyiddin said 2020 also went down as a year with frequent water disruptions that affected households and businesses, especially in the Klang Valley, due to the irresponsible act of dumping industrial waste into rivers.

He said the government would review compounds and penalties under the Environmental Quality Act 1974 so that stem action could be taken against such offenders.

The Prime Minister also said Budget 2021 provided a number of allocations under the fourth strategy of Ensuring Resource Sustainability, aimed at positively influencing environmental decisions in line with SDGs.

"Among others, RM20mil was allocated under the Malaysia-SDG



Trust Fund with the cooperation of the United Nations, that aims to systematically coordinate financing from public and private institutions in ensuring SDGs are achieved by 2030," he said.

"The government will support bipartisan cooperation to localise SDG programmes with a sum of RM5mil to the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on SDGs.

"In August last year, the first digital sukuk, Sukuk Prihatin, exceeded the target of RM666mil in subscriptions.

"For this year, the first Sustainability Bond for environmental and social initiatives will be issued."

Muhyiddin said the income tax exemption for the Sustainable and Responsible Investment (SRI) green sukuk grant would also be extended until 2025 to encourage the issuance of SRI products and bonds.

Apart from that, he said the government would continue the Green Technology Financing Scheme 3.0 with RM2bil in funding for two years until 2022.

He said these measures would serve as a great opportunity, espe-

cially for companies that plan to invest in green technology.

"Industrialisation in Malaysia needs to be environmental-friendly and adopt a sustainable consumption and production approach."

This year, IOI Pan Century Oleochemicals Sdn Bhd was awarded the highest honour, bagging the Challenge Trophy in the 2019/ 20 Prime Minister's Hibiscus Awards.

The firm based in Pasir Gudang was among 72 companies from the private sector that participated in the awards, the country's premier environmental awards that recognise environmental accomplishment and leadership.

The awards give recognition to participating companies committed to reducing the impact of their operations on the environment in particular, given the intensifying pressures for businesses to engage themselves in sustainable development.

They also serve to create environmental awareness among enterprises that have yet to demonstrate stewardship and identify areas for improvement in environmental management.

For the full list of winners, go to TheStar.com.my.