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DOING WHAT MATTERS, TOUCHING LIVES

The Edge, Malaysia



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This year's CR Awards judges Koh (second from left), Jeffrey (second from right) and Dorothy (right), with The Edge editor-in-chief Kathy Fong (centre) and senior editor Cindy Yeap (left), who oversaw The Edge Billion Ringgit Club Awards special pullout from 2011 to 2025

BY ADAM AZIZ

Growth and responsibility need not pull in opposite directions. Corporate Malaysia's leading companies are showing that the two can go hand in hand by focusing on environmental, sustainability and governance issues most material to their businesses and stakeholders, and measuring the outcomes to continuously realign their efforts. That philosophy stood out to judges assessing the corporate responsibility (CR) component of The Edge Billion Ringgit Club (BRC) Awards 2026.

This year, 82 companies were assessed by the BRC CR panel. CR accounts for 20% of the score in determining The Edge BRC's Company of the Year, alongside growth in profit after tax, shareholder returns and return on equity over three years. Jeffrey Teoh, head of wholesale banking at OCBC Bank (Malaysia) Bhd, says CR has steadily evolved from a supporting initiative into a core business consideration. "Leading companies increasingly recognise that responsible business practices strengthen resilience, deepen stakeholder trust and sustain long-term growth," Jeffrey says at the BRC CR judges' meeting on July 30. "We observed more companies taking a deliberate approach towards governance, sustainability and stakeholder stewardship. This reflects rising expectations from investors, customers, business partners and regulators."

The judges commended Sunway Construction Group Bhd (KL:SUNCON), which won the CR award for

the first time, for focusing on what can be controlled at construction sites. SunCon, also this year's Company of the Year, is joint winner of the CR award for companies below RM10 billion market capitalisation, alongside three-time winner Carlsberg Brewery Malaysia Bhd (KL:CARLSBG).

SunCon's measures include reducing wastage and raising standards for its workforce and the surrounding community. In 2025, alternative water sources accounted for 39.3% of its water consumption. Community-linked measures spanned mosquito control, medical screening, post-flood recovery efforts, construction industry talent growth, and an open communication channel for communities surrounding its construction sites. Carlsberg, likewise, anchors responsibility to its product. The brewer identified responsible drinking and marketing as one of its most significant sustainability-related matters. Measures include breathalysers at selected events, alcohol-free options, and partnerships with ride-hailing operators to discourage drink-driving.

Public Bank Bhd (KL:PBBANK), a first-time CR award winner in the above-RM40 billion market capitalisation category, channels responsibility through its role as a financial intermediary. In 2025, it launched PB Sustain, a platform offering customers sustainability capacity-building, financing products and impact calculators for greenhouse gas emissions estimations as well as for savings from use of solar energy and electric vehicles.

COMPANIES THAT HAVE WON THE EDGE BRC CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY (CR) AWARDS OVER THE YEARS (2010-2026)

3 CR TROPHIES

- Carlsberg Brewery Malaysia Bhd
- Gamuda Bhd
- Malayan Banking Bhd
- Sime Darby Bhd
- Sunway Bhd
- United Plantations Bhd

2 CR TROPHIES

- Allianz Malaysia Bhd
- CIMB Group Holdings Bhd
- IOI Corp Bhd
- Nestle (M) Bhd
- Petronas Chemicals Group Bhd
- SD Guthrie Bhd
- Telekom Malaysia Bhd
- Tenaga Nasional Bhd

1 CR TROPHY

- Axiata Group Bhd
- Bursa Malaysia Bhd
- CelcomDigi Bhd
- Heineken Malaysia Bhd
- KPJ Healthcare Bhd
- Press Metal Aluminium Holdings Bhd
- Public Bank Bhd
- RHB Bank Bhd
- Sunway Construction Group Bhd

Note: For consistency, the list does not take into account second and third place CR winners from 2012 to 2014

CR SCORES WERE VERY CLOSE AMONG TOP CONTENDERS

2026 CR INITIATIVE TOP SCORERS

SUPER BIG CAP

- Public Bank Bhd (2026 winner)
- IHH Healthcare Bhd
- Press Metal Aluminium Holdings Bhd (2022 joint winner)

BIG CAP

- United Plantations Bhd (2016, 2023 & 2026 winner)
- Sime Darby Bhd (2014 & 2022 winner, 2018 joint winner)
- KPJ Healthcare Bhd (2022 winner)

BELOW RM10 BILLION MARKET CAP

- Carlsberg Brewery Malaysia Bhd (2016, 2023 & 2026 winner)
- Sunway Construction Group Bhd (2026 joint winner)
- British American Tobacco (M) Bhd
- IGB Commercial Real Estate Investment Trust

Note: ■ 2026 winner

By end-2025, Public Bank had mobilised more than RM77 billion in sustainable finance since 2020, putting it on track to exceed its RM100 billion target by 2030. More than RM10 billion in affordable-home financing had benefited more than 50,600 low- to middle-income earners, while inclusive-finance activities had reached more than 1.8 million people since 2021.

United Plantations Bhd (KL:UTDPLT), a third-time winner this year, has raised its 2030 greenhouse gas emissions reduction target to 70%, with current progress ahead of schedule by five years. Beyond promoting good agricultural practices among independent smallholders, the group also addressed key issues affecting foreign workers, including recruitment fees, middlemen exploitation, workplace safety and amenities, and educational facilities for their children.

REAL COMMITMENT TO CR

What is admirable is companies demonstrated "a commitment to CR over and above their generating shareholder value", says Philip Koh Tong Ngee, senior partner at Mah-Kamariyah & Philip Koh Advocates & Solicitors.

While there is no specific statutory duty governing CR under the Companies Act 2016, listed companies are increasingly guided by sustainability reporting requirements and other forms of capital-market "soft law", Koh says. Shareholder returns and wider stakeholder interests are increasingly addressed through practices aligned with long-term value, he adds.

"The companies that were reviewed demonstrated admirable commitment to CR over and above generating shareholder value. It's not only the winners, but all who submitted their reports ought to be congratulated."

The next challenge is broadening that progress. Large listed companies generally have the resources and expertise to identify sustainability risks and invest in solutions, unlike smaller businesses in their supply chains.

"What billion-dollar companies do may not be representative of the ecosystem," Jeffrey says.

OCBC therefore works with partners to help small and medium enterprises adopt similar practices, while government, financial institutions and large companies can support them through access to credit, financing and ratings.

DO NOT LOSE SIGHT OF THE HUMAN ELEMENT

Taking a step back, it is important to remember that behind the numbers are real people whose lives are shaped by the actions — or inaction — of businesses, says Dorothy Teoh, CEO of The Edge Education Foundation.

Dorothy recalls the recent catastrophic flooding in Nepal following a glacial collapse, where scores of Malaysians remain uncontactable — including colleagues, close friends and relatives.

"For me, in the aftermath of the Nepal disaster, the judging process became less of an academic exercise," Dorothy says.

"While the collapse was not due to just a warming climate, climate change-driven warming caused by human activities has devastating effects ... It is easy to get caught up with KPIs and measurements, and to lose sight of the human element."

"The glaciers of the Himalayas may seem to have little relevance for most Malaysians. But we share one planet, and each of us — whether corporates or individuals — has a part to play in combating climate warming."

See BRC methodology next page

