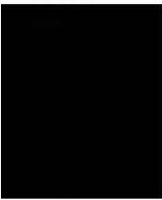


20 APR, 2025

Can Malaysia afford to wait?

The Sun, Malaysia





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EVERY year, as April rolls around and Earth Day appears on the horizon, we're nudged – ever so gently, sometimes urgently – into reflecting on our relationship with the environment. Posters go up. Talks are held. Hashtags start circulating. For a few days, the planet becomes the main character. But in a world teetering on the edge of environmental tipping points, perhaps the real question we should ask is: Can Malaysia afford to wait for Earth Day to remind us of our responsibilities?

The idea of sustainability may have sounded like a distant concept or a trendy buzzword reserved for eco-enthusiasts. Not anymore. As the climate shifts and floods become more frequent, even in our own backyards, the concept has taken on a much more tangible, immediate form. It's not about saving the whales or hugging trees (though those are important too); it's about whether our children will have clean air, safe water or even a decent patch of green to sit under in the next few decades.

In Malaysia, the signs are already here. You don't need a scientific paper to tell you the weather's gone rogue. From flash floods in downtown Kuala Lumpur to extended dry spells in the north, climate unpredictability is the new normal. Add to that vanishing forests, choking rivers and wildlife caught in an ever-tightening squeeze and the picture begins to blur into one of quiet urgency.

"Sustainability is about ensuring a vibrant and healthy Malaysia, for people, nature and our shared future," says Dr Henry Chan, WWF-Malaysia's director of conservation and acting CEO. And he's right. It's not about choosing between development and the environment. It's about recognising that our well-being is intertwined with the health of the planet. When our rivers are polluted, not just fish suffer – farmers, households and entire ecosystems are also impacted. When forests disappear, so do the cooling canopies that regulate temperatures and provide water sources, not to mention the homes of endangered species like the Malayan tiger and orangutan.

UEM Lestra Berhad, established in 2023 as a wholly owned subsidiary and green industries arm of UEM Group Berhad, recognises this interconnectedness. "We are committed to supporting government initiatives that establish Malaysia as a regional leader in renewable energy," says CEO Harman Faiz Habib Muhammad. "Through strategic partnerships with local and international stakeholders, we're enhancing domestic green capabilities and nurturing local talent."



Sustainability cannot be achieved through isolated efforts alone, it's a collective performance.

Can Malaysia afford to wait?

Sustainability efforts are becoming increasingly crucial as the nation grapples with climate change, pollution and deforestation



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Chan, director of conservation and acting CEO of WWF-Malaysia



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The company recently announced ambitious investments, including RM1.5 billion allocated to decarbonise industrial parks within the next two years. This move is expected to stimulate domestic direct investment, generate high-quality employment and attract foreign investors. Developing a significant 1GW hybrid solar photovoltaic power plant integrated with a renewable energy industrial park is a cornerstone of their sustainability agenda. This flagship initiative underpins Malaysia's National Energy Transition Roadmap and signals a strong push towards greener industrialisation.

Chan paints a picture that is equally sober and hopeful.

"WWF-Malaysia is committed to conserving iconic wildlife such as tigers, orangutans, elephants, marine turtles and sharks and protecting ecosystems vital to our well-being, including forests, oceans, rivers and wetlands," he says.

"Our work is grounded in critical pillars, safeguarding wildlife, conserving forests, protecting oceans and freshwater ecosystems, promoting sustainable food systems and addressing climate and energy challenges."

Yet, sustainability cannot be achieved through isolated efforts alone, it's a collective performance. Everyone plays a part, from government ministers signing off on green policies to corporations rethinking their supply chains and even down to the everyday choices made by individuals.

Top Glove, Malaysia's prominent glove manufacturer, exemplifies this integrated approach. "Businesses must proactively integrate sustainability into operations – not just for compliance, but as a strategic imperative," says Top Glove managing director Lim Cheong Guan. "A strong ESG foundation fosters trust, enhances efficiency and creates a workplace that attracts top talent."



We recognise that to achieve sustainability requires collaboration. The collective support of all stakeholders is essential in driving meaningful progress."

Lim, managing director of Top Glove

Top Glove's commitment to the Ten Zero initiative emphasises its ambitious sustainability targets, including net-zero carbon emissions, zero waste, zero deforestation and zero reliance on municipal water. The company notably achieved an 11.6% reduction in carbon emission intensity in FY2024 alone, reflecting its substantial investment in green practices. Top Glove expanded solar energy capacity significantly to 11.2 MWp from the previous 7.74 MWp, a 45% increase within one year. Additionally, it has embraced a circular economy approach, recycling waste generated from glove production and significantly reducing municipal water use by 29%.

Local businesses and individual actions amplify these larger corporate and governmental initiatives. For instance, community-driven enterprises like The Hive Bulk Foods encourage sustainable consumption habits through plastic-free shopping and promote environmentally friendly lifestyles. Similarly, the Biji-Biji Initiative inspires innovation through repurposing

waste materials and fostering community-based eco-education programmes. Even our daily routines, such as commuting, can move the sustainability needle. With Kuala Lumpur's expanding MRT and LRT networks, more Malaysians are encouraged to ditch cars in favour of cleaner, public transport alternatives. Every individual who opts for a train ride over driving alone contributes incrementally but meaningfully toward reducing urban air pollution and carbon emissions. Malaysia's Low Carbon Cities Framework furthers this, guiding urban development towards greener, more liveable cities.

Government commitments also reinforce these grassroots and corporate efforts. Malaysia's National Energy Transition Roadmap ambitiously targets generating 31% of the nation's energy from renewable sources by 2025 and 40% by 2035. While solar, hydroelectric and net energy metering programmes are scaling up to achieve these goals, ongoing fossil fuel dependence and enforcing environmental regulations still present significant hurdles.

Nowhere is the urgency clearer than with water. Despite abundant rainfall, water shortages are increasingly common due to inefficient usage and polluted rivers. Agencies like Lembaga Urus Air Selangor actively advocate water conservation, highlighting simple measures households can adopt – such as fixing leaks, installing efficient water fixtures, or collecting rainwater – to make significant cumulative impacts.

Education is another critical component. Environmental awareness must start early. Children who learn sustainable practices in schools, like recycling, composting and conservation, carry these habits into adulthood, cultivating lasting impacts on communities. Schools across Malaysia are increasingly integrating sustainability lessons into curriculums, setting the stage for a more environmentally conscious generation.

The private sector's role remains crucial and transparency in sustainability reporting helps hold companies accountable. Public scrutiny of ESG commitments, backed by independent audits and international benchmarks, pushes companies toward genuine rather than superficial changes. More Malaysian firms recognise sustainability as an integral part of their identity, not merely a marketing tactic.

So, where does that leave us?

"This Earth Day, we invite everyone – individuals, businesses and policymakers to join this crucial effort actively," Chan urges.

"By taking meaningful action today, we collectively shape a resilient and sustainable Malaysia for future generations."

It's tempting to see sustainability as someone else's responsibility, distant from our daily lives. But the haze drifting into our living rooms, rising electricity bills during prolonged heatwaves, and increasingly expensive vegetables due to poor soil health and water scarcity are stark reminders that sustainability is personal. Ignoring these issues won't make them vanish – they'll only intensify.

Yet, despite the challenges, hope abounds. It exists in schoolchildren enthusiastically participating in community clean-ups, companies genuinely rethinking their business models towards sustainable production and families turning small apartment balconies into flourishing edible gardens. Sustainability is built into the choices we make daily, the habits we cultivate and the uncomfortable questions we dare to ask ourselves and one another.

Earth Day shouldn't be seen merely as a day of celebration but rather as a crucial annual moment for honest reflection: How are we doing, individually and collectively?

Because the undeniable truth remains: Malaysia cannot afford to wait. Not anymore.

