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Driving Asean's green agenda

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IN 2015, United Nations member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, outlining 17 interconnected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals aim to eradicate poverty and inequality, protect the planet, and ensure health, justice and prosperity for all. However, with only a few years remaining to achieve these goals, none is expected to be fully realised globally by 2030. While Asean has made progress, especially in poverty alleviation and economic growth, the region faces mounting challenges.

THE ASEAN CASE
This underscores the need to address sustainable development in Asean, particularly in Malaysia, while navigating challenges. Recognising this, Sunway University hosted the Asean Workshop on Sustainable Development recently, providing a platform to emphasise sustainability in the region and showcase initiatives for a brighter future. Under the theme "Accelerating Asean's Progress on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals", the workshop brought together regional leaders to discuss strategies for advancing sustainable development, focusing on education, environmental

stewardship, trade, energy and smart urban development. Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof, representing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, highlighted Malaysia's pivotal role as Asean's chair in 2025. He outlined three initiatives to accelerate SDG realisation: energy decarbonisation, biodiversity protection and economic connectivity. "These efforts are not only vital to achieving our shared development goals, but will also position Asean as a global leader in sustainability and resilience," Fadillah said. He said transitioning to a low-carbon energy grid powered by renewables was a necessity for decarbonisation and energy security. He addressed biodiversity preservation, calling for increased regional conservation efforts and a treaty for sustainable land-use practices under Malaysia's chairmanship. Economic connectivity, he added, requires integrated infrastructure, such as high-speed rail and universal 5G access, to strengthen regional integration and bridge digital divides. "Collaboration among governments, the private sector and civil society is needed to drive innovation and resilience. "The road ahead is challenging, but the rewards — a thriving, sustainable Asean — are worth the effort."

ADOPTING THE THREE-P STRATEGY
Sunway Group chairman Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah urged corporations to adopt the Three-P bottom line: People, Planet and Prosperity. This approach broadens focus beyond financial returns to include



(From left) Sunway Education group chief executive officer Professor Datuk Elizabeth Lee; United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UN-SDSN) president and Sunway University Sir Jeffrey Cheah Distinguished Professor Dr Jeffrey D. Sachs; Asean secretary-general Dr Kao Kim Hourn; Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof; UN-SDSN Malaysia chairman and Sunway Group founder and chairman Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah; UN-SDSN Asia head Professor Emeritus Ulung Datuk Dr Woo Wing Thy; and, Sunway Group deputy chairman Tan Sri Razman M. Hashim.

all stakeholders. "Corporations can play their part by prioritising sustainability alongside profitability, benefiting shareholders, customers, employees and communities." He acknowledged the bleak global progress towards SDGs, referencing a UN report highlighting the possibility of failing to achieve a single goal by 2030. Despite these challenges, Cheah expressed optimism in humanity's ability to overcome adversity. Meanwhile, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) president Professor Dr Jeffrey D. Sachs highlighted Malaysia's opportunity to lead breakthroughs as Asean's chair. He said the world struggled with conflict and confusion, but emphasised the potential for advancements in prosperity, education, healthcare

and agriculture. "Despite the challenges, 2025 will be a year of breakthroughs. I am confident Malaysia will contribute significantly, supported by the Asean Secretariat's work on a vision for the region's future."

MULTILATERAL ACTION
Asean secretary-general Dr Kao Kim Hourn emphasised the urgency of multilateral action to achieve the SDGs. He said climate change, economic stagnation and rising inequalities hinder development for Asean's 700 million people. "Our forest coverage has declined to 46 per cent, while climate impacts are pushing millions into poverty. "Yet Asean remains resilient, with

a gross domestic product of US\$3.8 trillion in 2023." He highlighted efforts to transition to renewable energy and conserve biodiversity, such as planting 10 million trees under the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and expanding protected areas through the Asean Heritage Parks Programme. Kao said the Asean Community Vision 2045 and accompanying strategic plans, set for adoption this year, will provide a roadmap for sustainable development. For the first time, Asean will implement a 20-year vision guided by principles of peace, prosperity and people. "Peace forms the bedrock on which our region's prosperity can flourish. By fostering dialogue, nurturing trust and resolving conflicts, we build lasting stability."

