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ZAKRI ABDUL HAMID

SUSTAINABLE LIVING

# TOWARDS A CARBON-NEUTRAL MALAYSIA BY 2050

The country's leadership is taking a long-term, strategic look at the future

**A**SIA's responses to global climate change underpin the very survival of humankind and other life forms on this planet.

Due to the continent's socio-demographic and economic weight, what happens – or

doesn't happen – in Asia will determine whether the world achieves global sustainability and climate targets.

Malaysia is fully committed to being a key part of the global transition to a low-carbon, and eventually carbon-neutral society, with ambitions of achieving this by 2050.

The historic Paris Agreement, in force since Nov 4 last year, aims to cap global temperature rise at 2°C above pre-industrial levels. Importantly, the agreement also seeks to help developing and less developed nations deal with the impact of climate change with financing, new technology and ca-

capacity building.

United Nations member states have also agreed on the New Urban Agenda, laying out how cities should be planned and managed to best promote sustainable urbanisation. It is a roadmap for building cities that can serve as engines of prosperity and centres of cultural and social wellbeing while protecting the environment.

Malaysia, as an environmentally responsible developing economy, ratified these and the Sustainable Development Goals – three agendas which together create a coherent and holistic policy framework for national, re-

gional and city-level development planning.

If such a policy framework sounds overwhelming and unnerving enough, the real, still bigger challenge lies in the "operationalisation" of the whole idea.

Our ability to tackle two questions is highly crucial:

How do we engage and empower the people – the current and future generations – in the development process? How do we ensure that we do not only enthusiastically create such a framework and formulate the ensuing policies, but also see to the actual implementation of the policies on the ground, yielding real impact in the city spaces and places where we live, learn, work and play?

As a rapidly developing Asian economy that aspires to be a high-income nation by 2020, Malaysia continues to be mindful of its responsibility for environmental stewardship and sustainability while creating a higher quality of life for all citizens.

A case in point is our commitment to preserve more than half the country's land area under primary rainforest coverage indefinitely. This is a significant contribution to the world in terms of a carbon sink, biodiversity, environmental services and eco-heritage. Malaysia hosts the oldest tropical rainforests in the world, dating back 130 million years.

Malaysia's leadership has proactively set out to take a long-term, strategic look at the future. Last January, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak initiated a year-long exercise to chart the country's transformation to a "Top 20 Nation" by 2050 in terms of prosperity, sustainability and happiness.

In the national dialogue to create Transformasi Nasional (TN50), a constantly emerging theme, in particular in comments from young adults, has been environmental sustainability and resilience, including the need to achieve carbon neutrality by

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National Hydraulic Research Institute of Malaysia volunteers cleaning up Sungai Langat as part of the Malaysia Environment Week in Bangi, Selangor, last Sunday. The country's commitment to preserve more than half its land area under primary rainforest coverage is a significant contribution to the world in terms of a carbon sink, biodiversity, environmental services and eco-heritage. PIC BY ROSELA ISMAIL

**“**As a rapidly developing Asian economy that aspires to be a high-income nation by 2020, Malaysia continues to be mindful of its responsibility for environmental stewardship and sustainability while creating a higher quality of life for all citizens.  
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# Malaysia setting the standard for climate action at city level

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2050. It is heartening to hear this from the generation who will helm the country's development and progress between 2020 and 2050.

Malaysia has already pledged to cut national carbon emission intensity by 45 per cent by 2030 based on 2005 emission levels. Clearly, more will be required of us, building on our successes to date.

Since 2009, Malaysia has put in place a progression of policies, legislative frameworks and implementation mechanisms to catapult the nation into a sustainable, green and low-carbon future.

Key examples include:

The 10th and 11th Malaysia Plans, our five-year national development plans, which specifically highlight the achievement of green living environments, sustainable green growth, low car-

bon transport and competitive cities;

The National Green Technology Policy (2009) and creation of Green-Tech Malaysia under the Energy, Green Technology and Water Ministry;

The Renewable Energy Act and the Low Carbon City Framework and Assessment System (both 2011);

Setting up SCP Malaysia to spearhead sustainable consumption and production nationwide; and,

The National Policy on Biological Diversity 2016-2025.

Beyond these and other national-level efforts, governments at the sub-national, city and regional levels have taken ambitious initiatives to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Among these, I would highlight and commend Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, specifically the UTM-Low Carbon Asia Research Centre (UTM-LCARC) led

by Professor Ho Chin Siang.

Since 2008, it has been pioneering and operationalising the "Science to Action" or S2A approach to translating climate change research into city-level low carbon society policies and actions. This is already being implemented in seven major cities, including Putrajaya, Kuala Lumpur and the iconic Iskandar Malaysia Economic Corridor.

Clear reduction targets in terms of carbon emission intensity per gross domestic product have been set based on UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) and IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)-recognised modelling methodology, with strong support from Japanese universities and research institutions.

For the cities and economic corridor, we are looking at a 60 per cent reduction for Putrajaya by the year 2025; 70 per cent for

Kuala Lumpur by 2030; and 58 per cent for Iskandar Malaysia by 2025.

Progress is guided by blueprints tailored to the specific economic, social and environmental contexts of each urban area. The blueprints are multi- and cross-sectoral, scientifically grounded and people-centric, embracing stakeholder engagement through focus group discussions.

UTM-LCARC, meanwhile, is helping the Pengerang Local Authority in the Johor Eastern Economic Corridor to de-carbonise its upcoming RM60 billion regional oil and gas storage and hub project, and the anticipated rapid urbanisation that will follow.

This is a very big challenge considering the carbon intensity of the oil and gas industry, but preliminary modelling results indicate a potential reduction in carbon emission of up to 50 per cent by 2030 compared with the busi-

ness-as-usual scenario.

Malaysia is committed to materially contributing to global climate change mitigation. Especially at the city level, we have mobilised a transition to low carbon emissions, setting the standard in formulating research-based, effective climate action plans.

We are now looking to disseminate and share our experiences and expertise with interested developing countries and their rapidly developing cities and, in the process, to learn from these cities as well.

With more countries and cities working to cut their carbon emissions, we will create a better, more sustainable future for our common good.

The writer is science adviser to the prime minister. Excerpted from a keynote address to the 3rd International Conference of Low Carbon Asia and Beyond, Nov 1-3, Bangkok