



06 MAR, 2023

We must take care of nature to take care of ourselves

New Straits Times, Malaysia



PLANETARY HEALTH

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PLANETARY health is now a sexy topic. As the world races to embrace the low carbon economy, governments and businesses are declaring their commitment to champion planetary health.

Planetary health falls under the bigger agenda of avoiding the impending climate crisis.

As consumers become more aware that industries contribute to the crisis, businesses worldwide are taking notice, and therefore taking steps to demonstrate they also care.

Many now subscribe to ESG (environmental, social and governance).

Sustainability certification is a way for businesses to show compliance.

Some are taking advantage of the business opportunities presented by sustainability certificates.

In the meantime, biodiversity conservation is promoted as a potent prescription for a robust planetary health.

Scientists have shared much evidence on the important role flora and fauna play in sustaining planetary health.



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Unless the fragile biodiversity is conserved, climate experts predict grave consequences for humanity.

There is no denying that our bio-diverse nature is a key part in life's complex jigsaw.

Biodiversity scientists alert the world that many critical parts of the jigsaw are under serious threat because of our own doing.

The disappearance of some of nature's species is a good example of the threat.

A growing body of research warns of the disturbing fact that humanity must stop the pace of wildlife extinction, or face extinction itself.

At a time when more than one million species are at risk of extinction, and the links between

human health and the health of the planet are clear, scientists admit the stakes have never been higher.

The Internet is replete with articles spelling out the importance of biodiversity to humanity, and why biodiversity is critical for the stability of the planet.

Conservation researchers say that species are to ecosystems what rivets are to a plane's wing.

Losing one might not be a disaster, but each loss adds to the likelihood of a serious problem.

Whether in a village in the Amazon or a metropolis such as Beijing, humans depend on the services ecosystems provide, such as fresh water, pollination, soil fertility and stability, food and medicine.

Ecosystems weakened by the loss of biodiversity are less likely to deliver those services, especially given the needs of an ever-growing human population, now fast approaching 10 billion.

Research confirms the close link between disease outbreaks and the degradation of nature.

Seventy per cent of emerging viral diseases have spread from animals to humans. We must,

therefore, take care of nature to take care of ourselves.

By protecting biodiversity in Earth's ecosystems, countries could help prevent future pandemics.

Furthermore, studies also show that nature can deliver at least 30 per cent of the emissions reductions needed by 2030 to prevent climate catastrophe.

Protecting biodiversity helps us achieve these emissions reductions.

Some ecosystems, such as mangroves, are good at storing carbon.

A recent book by Professor Ghazally Ismail, a former deputy vice-chancellor of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, titled *Mangrove Magic*, provides interesting reading.

The book is a sequel to his earlier offering titled *Monkey Moments*.

My recent encounter with him was at a Universiti Putra Malaysia symposium on biodiversity where he spoke.

He shared his passion for what I call a futuristic look at how we can best benefit from our biodiversity treasures.

He strongly believes in the idea of creating a national research and development centre for nature.

He has been, for years, a strong advocate of building a natural science museum for the country, not unlike the ones in London and the United States.

Unfortunately, he still has to continue to dream, unless we see a spark from the new administration, which seems passionate about change.

Conserving biodiversity is not just about leaving our forests untouched to lock in the carbon.

To tap on the hidden treasures of biodiversity, we need to invest in research.

We need to take measures to collect and preserve flora and fauna.

Who knows, there may be compounds that we have missed out that may hold the cure to debilitating diseases now and in the future.

Investment in a national R&D centre is not a bad idea.

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