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## We can tackle climate crisis with better policies

### ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

# We can tackle climate crisis with better policies

**T**HE formation of the government might have distracted us from the 27th Climate Change Conference (COP27) in Egypt that ended on Nov 20.

Many analysts and activists see COP27 as falling short of expectations, despite incremental progress and a symbolic moment to establish a loss-and-damage fund.

Perhaps the best way to describe COP is that "the more things change, the more they stay the same". Many meetings and landmark accords don't change the deepening disparity between commitments and actions.

The world has warmed by about 1.3°C and we will likely reach the 1.5°C threshold within a decade.

The United Nations Environment Programme's Emissions Gap Report 2022 stated that existing policies could lead to a 2.8°C rise by the end of the century.

Malaysia continues to experience climate-related impacts, such as flash floods and debris flows (*banjir puing*). The impact was often amplified by unsus-



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tainable development practices, such as uncontrolled logging and inefficient drainage.

But progress in science has warned that what we have seen is just the tip of the iceberg.

With the window for action continuing to close rapidly, climate-change impact is likely to worsen over the next few decades, impacting our sustainable development trajectory.

This means that on top of addressing economic challenges in the next year, the government needs to emphasise climate adaptation to cope with the adverse impacts of climate change.

Based on manifestos, climate

change is a major agenda item. Yet no manifesto proposes long-term adaptation strategies.

The focus is skewed towards decarbonisation and renewable energy, reflecting the vested interests in climate change at the international and domestic levels.

Because of political short-termism, there is a tendency for a new government to focus on flashy shovel-ready initiatives, but climate change and environmental degradation are systemic problems that demand making real, and often difficult, changes to policies and institutions, especially in environmental governance.

This could mean revising land use and urban planning processes and prioritising hard policy instruments and putting a price on externalities, such as taxes and fines.

One of many examples is putting a premium on high-risk development in environmentally sensitive areas, such as floodplains, to create market effects and fund local adaptation initiatives.

Perhaps it's time to consider

regulatory instruments to hold responsible parties liable and accountable.

We are seeing cases of climate litigation this year related to Kuala Lumpur, Klang and Taman Sri Muda (Shah Alam).

It won't be easy because some of these reforms are politically sensitive and unpopular among lobbyists and those with vested interests.

But it is necessary to protect public goods for collective welfare, and only a strong government and institutions can deliver this.

The government has embarked on hard regulatory instruments, such as the carbon tax proposed by the water and environment minister and the zero-discharge policy by the Selangor Water Management Authority (Luas).

Since it's a unity government, it will be intriguing and perhaps logical to combine proposals from across the parties.

For example, Pakatan Harapan's suggestion to increase the size of the ecological fiscal transfer to RM1 billion annually serves as the means to implement Barisan National's policy to in-

crease national forest cover to 60 per cent.

To achieve these aims, the coalition needs to focus on environmental and climate policies that every party agrees on and work with the opposition in a non-partisan manner.

And they should communicate these policies to the public about why these changes are important for Malaysia.

This will lay out the foundational principles and policy priorities as building blocks for Malaysia to reach its climate and environmental goals.

Ensuring policy continuity and improvement for the next five years and beyond, regardless of who will be in government, will strengthen implementation and boost confidence in businesses and investors.

Despite the political impasse post-election, Malaysia is showing signs that its democracy is maturing. Our approach to tackling the climate crisis must reflect this through better policies.

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