

KERATAN AKHBAR

NAMA AKHBAR: THE STAR

TARIKH: 23 JANUARI 2020

MUKA SURAT: 17

All quiet on plastic roadmap

WE are happy and proud that another 150 containers of plastic waste have been sent back to their country of origin at no cost to taxpayers. This is all thanks to the Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change Ministry (Mestec) and Customs Department, "We don't want your plastic" (*The Star*, Jan 21).

This move sends a tough and stern warning that our country will not be a rubbish dump for other countries, especially developed countries that falsely preach about their supposedly high recycling rate. Reality now is being dumped on their own doorstep and there is a big stink surrounding their recycling policies and implementation.

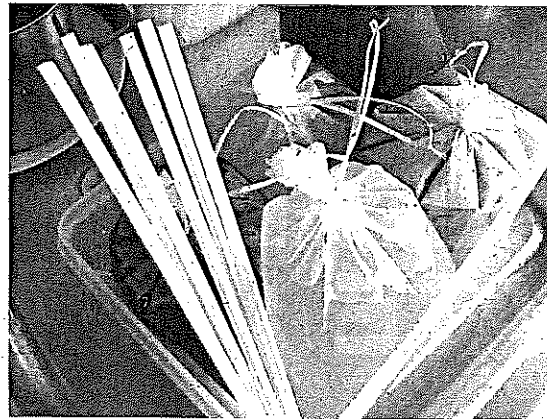
It is hoped that these developed countries with their greater wealth and better technology would implement strict policies to live up to their boast about their high recycling rate.

This is also the time for them to step up on reducing single-use plastic and come up with viable alternative products and methods besides recycling.

Closer to home, Indonesia and the Philippines have totally banned single-use plastic in major areas and cities since the beginning of this year. Brunei's "No Plastic Bag Every Day" policy started in 2019.

Bangladesh, the first country to ban plastic bags (in 2002), has now included a ban of all single-use plastic products. China has revealed a bold and positive gradual plan to ban or restrict single-use, non-degradable plastic in major cities by 2025. And despite being poorer developing nations, 16 countries in Africa have banned plastic bags.

In Malaysia, after the flurry of charges and further bans on usage of single-use plastic bags and straws in some states last year, no new initiative from the government has emerged to drive



the now silent Roadmap Towards Zero Single-Use Plastics 2018-2030, which was launched by Mestec in October 2018.

The voluntary charges on plastic bags as recommended by the Roadmap remains only for fixed premises like supermarkets, department stores and fast food restaurants. Premises like wet markets, night markets, hawker stalls and food trucks, which are unfixed premises, do not have to charge for their plastic bags.

And apart from the few states that have voluntarily complied with the Roadmap guidelines for charging for plastic bags and banning plastic straws, no new ones have volunteered.

Regrettably, states like Selangor, Penang and the Federal Territories, which are more developed and advanced, have not implemented stricter policies or taken further action to reduce or ban single-use plastic products. They merely toed the line on the Roadmap's guidelines but have not shown the bold-

ness, independence, courage and concern in dealing with plastic usage like the major cities and areas in our neighbouring countries.

Except for sending back the imported rubbish, the government has also been silent on the Roadmap. There have been no public updates, reviews or tweaking of the policies to mitigate weaknesses or combat shifting issues and the current circumstances. Currently, there seems to be only stagnation and complacency.

We have just stepped into the critical decade that will decide whether we will live well, safely and comfortably with mitigated climate change or live in loss, insecurity, fear, anxiety and angst with the climate crisis. The policies implemented and the concrete and firm action we take in the first few years of this decade will have a very significant impact on all living forms on earth.

Plastic is also a health issue just like smoking. Clogged drains and

waterways breed mosquitoes and cause floods, which affect the health and well-being of the people.

Microplastic is already in the air we breathe, water we drink and food we eat. We have seen in animals the nasty effects of ingesting plastic. As microplastic builds up in our body, we will surely suffer a similar fate.

The government should now review and modify if necessary its guidelines to reflect the vast and rapidly shifting situation of the single-use plastic scourge. The 2030 timeline should be shortened by at least five years and the Roadmap be declared a federal policy. The shorter timeline is also in tune with the deadlines set by most countries of late.

Drastic problems call for drastic action. The smoking ban under the Federal Government has proven to be a great success. The same nationwide action could also be taken on single-use plastic.

Alternatives made from natural materials are already available for most single-use plastic products that are used daily. They may be slightly more expensive now because of the low volume of production, but with a concrete and comprehensive ban in place, prices would surely come down due to increased usage.

Even more encouraging is the raw materials for these alternative products like palm oil trees, banana trees, coconut trees and cassava are abundant in Malaysia.

When the future generations look back at this decade, how will they see us? I sincerely hope they will thank us all for the concern, perseverance, determination, energy and hard work we put in for them to live safely, comfortably and free from the effects of plastic pollution and climate change.

KOO WEE HON
Petaling Jaya