

Covid 19: A virus that cures Earth

The deadly virus, which is a curse to mankind, is a blessing in disguise for Mother Nature

BY KHIRTINI K KUMARAN

AS THE Covid 19 hits the globe with full force, many are being severely affected by it. Lives are being lost, hospitals and frontliners overwhelmed, countries shutting down and a global recession imminent.

But while the Covid 19 pandemic is casting a looming shadow on mankind, it seems to be shining brightly on Mother Nature. Lockdowns and restrictions on movements and activities enforced around the world to mitigate the spread of the virus seem to benefit planet earth. Many positive changes to the environment have been observed around the globe, and Malaysia is one of them.

Following the Malaysian government's enforcement of the first phase of Movement Control Order (MCO) from March 18-30, improvements to the air and water quality could be seen in those two weeks.

The Minister of Environment and Water, Datuk Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man, was quoted that the air quality nationwide had shown improvement as early as the first phase of the MCO.

Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) Faculty of Civil Engineering Technology senior lecturer, Dr Nurul Nadrah Aqilah Tukimat, told Bernama the MCO reduced air pollution.

She noted the average reading of the Air Pollution Index (API) was less than 60, while the readings in Kuantan (Pahang), Tanjung Malim (Perak), Paka (Terengganu),

The reduction in the greenhouse gas emission rate during the MCO had given the climate system a chance to breathe and recover."

– Dr Nurul Nadrah Aqilah Tukimat



Alor Setar (Kedah), Kangar (Perlis) and several areas in Sarawak were below 50.

"The reduction in the greenhouse gas emission rate during the MCO had given the climate system a chance to breathe and recover," she said.

Apart from the air, river waters are becoming more transparent as observed in the Klang Valley, like at Sungai Gombak, Sungai Way and Sungai Kemuning. Photographs of Sungai Pinang in Penang taken seven weeks apart show the river healing itself from pitch black to jade green with algae.

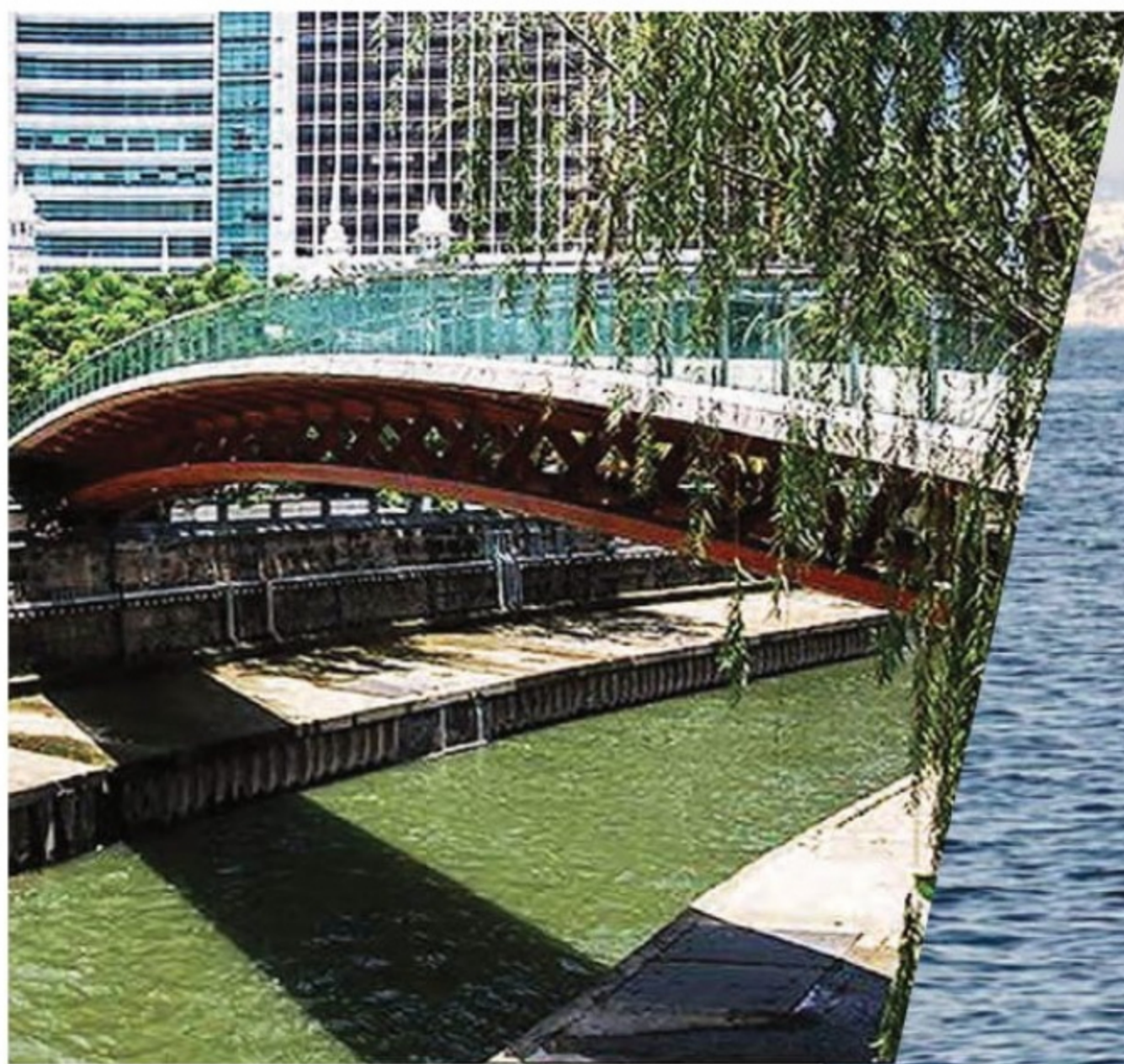
The MCO has seen all non-essential businesses closed. With many companies either ceasing or scaling down operations, there is a reduction in rubbish and wastewater entering and polluting the rivers.

Dr Mohd Yusoff Ishak, senior lecturer at the Faculty of Environment Studies at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), said among the activities that caused pollution were land development works and the release of waste into our from drains that flowed straight into the rivers.

He urged the public to continue practising the new normal, such as reducing the use personal vehicles, not releasing wastes directly into rivers as well as to stop disrupting the ecosystem.

Dr Renard Siew, climate change advisor with the Centre for Governance and Political Studies in Kuala Lumpur, has been tracking the API in Malaysia since March 17. His findings can be accessed via http://apims.doe.gov.my/public_v2/api_table.html.

"At the start of the MCO on March 18,



there was a slight increase in the API. This was due to people travelling (returning to hometowns while others were buying groceries and other necessities to prepare for the MCO)," said Dr Siew.

"But on March 21, we could see 'good' API reading had started to increase. In fact, on April 9, monitoring stations in Malaysia recording good API was 68 per cent."

According to Dr Siew, the drop in air pollution and cleaner waterways is a short-term effect because of the lockdown, and it will not last.

"Once the MCO is lifted, people will intensify their activities to catch up on lost time and productivity.

"We need to re-look at how we do business and improve the efficiency of our supply chain and logistics.

"There must be a change in systems to

lower carbon emissions and reduce the impact on the climate.

On another note, while we remain under lockdown and the environment heals itself, members of the animal kingdom have come to roam and venture freely out into the streets. With less to none of human movement and transportation traffic, there have been sightings of wildlife on the roads.

Info Bencana Terengganu posted a 21-second video on Facebook of four elephants walking near a petrol station in Kenyir, Terengganu, which was confirmed by the Terengganu Department of Wildlife and National Parks (Perhilitan). Also, wild otters were spotted at Taman Tasik Putrajaya. In Johor, a wandering male tapir in Jementah was rescued by Perhilitan Johor before being released back to the Endau Rompin National Park. — *The Health*

Global climate recovers too

LIKE MALAYSIA, the Covid-19 pandemic has paralyzed the world and had a significantly significant impact on our planet. There have been substantial changes in climate, environment and biodiversity across the globe.

Since Italy imposed its lockdown, the famous Venice canals have flourished, and images of its crystal-clear waters have made headlines. On top of that, a beautiful jellyfish was spotted swimming in the near-transparent waters.

Biologist Andrew Mangoni, who captured the video of the aquatic life, told CNN: "A combination of low tide and low traffic has led to the deposition of sediments on the bottom of the canal which has led to an increased transparency of the water in the canals of Venice."

Apart from Italy, many other countries have reported positive results with air pollution levels.

China, the first epicentre of Covid-19, along with other nations in Asia and Europe, have reported a significant reduction in air pollution levels. For India, with the recent improvements in air quality, the Himalayas are visible for the first time in 30 years to the people in Punjab State. In Europe, satellite images show nitrogen dioxide emissions fading away over northern Italy, as well as in Spain and the United Kingdom.

While the cleaner and brighter environmental changes are in motion during the pandemic, there is the question of whether it will last after the crisis subsides. Kimberly Nicholas, a sustainability science researcher at Lund University in Sweden, shared with BBC that for the duration of reduced travel, these emissions will stay lower. This is because transport makes up 23 per cent of global carbon emission. Therefore, when the lockdowns are lifted, and life is back to normal, so will the pollution and with it the greenhouse gases, contributing to global warming.

To maintain these positive changes in climate, governments should immediately shift to cleaner energy alternatives. There has to be drastic climate change mitigation and efforts as they restart their country and economies.