



ข่าวสิ่งแวดล้อม ประจำวันที่ **วันที่ 3 ธันวาคม 2560**

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Time to clean up our environment

Environmental issues are under the global spotlight as thousands of environmentalists including policymakers and non-state actors from more than 100 countries around the world gather in Kenyan capital Nairobi this week for a high-profile forum due to start tomorrow. The two-day forum, titled the Environment Assembly, is being organised by UN Environment, formerly the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

Needless to say, environmental problems — solid waste and filthy air — that have compromised people's health and well-being deserve attention as well as intensified efforts and cooperation to combat them.

The Thai government has assigned senior officials from the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry to this world event. They are to share with their colleagues the problems they are facing, the progress they have made, and the challenges that await them.

There are reports that Thai authorities plan to showcase several tasks they executed with an aim to tackle waste in particular. Prior to the Environment Assembly, the ministry on Nov 22 held a regional forum on reducing waste at sea. Held in the tourist province of Phuket, the forum was the first Asean meeting on such a topic.

Of the two projects, the first which Thailand shared with its Asean friends involved a smoking ban on 24 beaches in 15 provinces as cigarette butts take 12 years to degrade. A ministry survey showed that, prior to the ban, butts weighing 1.66kg were scraped up per square kilometre of crowded beaches at popular Thai resort islands. The campaign, which took effect last month, has received a mixed reception, with critics saying it is too authoritarian.

Another task, which is still at the planning stage, involves an effort by the Pollution Control Department to end the use of plastic cap seals on drinking water bottles.

The department said nine manufacturers of drinking water have stopped using plastic cap seals. By next year, the agency targets half of all manufacturers to do the same. By 2019, it aims for all of them to put an end to this unnecessary packaging.

The agency is right in recognising waste as an urgent matter, but it is unfortunate that its efforts are too modest given the severity of the problem, especially involving plastic waste.

There are so many examples for Thai authorities attending the Environment Assembly in the Kenyan capital to learn from

Every year Thailand generates 4.4 billion bottles of drinking water, with 60% using plastic cap seals, generating 520 tonnes of waste, according to the department. In order to achieve its goal, the department has engaged all manufacturers, talking them into joining a memorandum of understanding — an agreement that they will follow the same direction.

According to the UN Environment authority, Thailand is the sixth-biggest polluter in terms of plastic waste that enters the ocean. The world's top four polluters are all in Asia — namely China, which releases 2.22 million tonnes of plastic waste every year, Indonesia with 1.29 million tonnes, the Philippines and Vietnam.

The Environment Ministry said Thailand's 24 coastal provinces produce about 10 million tonnes of waste every year, with up to 10% expected to be released into the sea. In some areas, there are reports that marine animals have been contaminated. In other words, it has entered the food chain.

Plastic cap seals are just the tip of a waste iceberg.

A more serious problem is one-time-use plastic bags — a contentious item that several countries have outlawed, including Kenya, which is hosting the Environment Assembly. Kenya slapped a total ban on one-time plastic bags in August. Violators face hefty fines and even jail terms.

In the case of Thailand, it is apparent that environmental authorities are still sluggish in dealing with this kind of waste, sticking to some passive measures such as awareness-raising campaigns that have had no real effect. With such measures, Thai consumers have the liberty to pollute.

That needs to change. There are so many examples for Thai authorities attending the Environment Assembly in the Kenyan capital to learn from. First thing first, they must realise that the same old approach will not take them anywhere.

If outlawing is too harsh, at least the authorities must make those who still want to use plastic bags pay more.

Erik Solheim, head of UN Environment, in his statement ahead of the assembly called for a new approach in tackling environmental problems. What is needed is proactive measures, he said.

Thai delegates should not be complacent but take this opportunity to learn from experience from other countries and think of how to translate that into practice in the Thai context.

Walking from the forum empty-handed would be a pity. It is in everyone's interest to improve the environment.