

**Committee:** Association of Southeast Asian Nations Committee

**Issue:** Economic and environmental devastation in Malaysia

**Student Officer:** Iliia Papastamati

**Position:** Deputy President

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## INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a country in the Southeast Asia, sharing land and maritime borders with Brunei, China, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. It was one of the founders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and since its independence from the United Kingdom in 1963 its economy has grown, currently ranking 55th out of 157 countries, according to the World Bank's Human Capital Index. The introduction of Malaysia's New Economic Policy (NEP), in 1970, raised a heated debate whether it efficiently reached its goal of eradicating poverty and providing greater economic opportunities to the citizens. Its replacement by the National Development Policy (NDP) continues to raise new questions, since it continues to pursue most of the previous policies and goals. Meanwhile, Malaysia has the highest rate of forest loss of the main countries that are reducing their forests, in order to construct industrial oil palm plantation. The deforestation of the Malaysian tropical rainforests results in adding carbon dioxide to the air, increasing greenhouse gases, threatening the biodiversity and disrupting the water cycle. Adding the pollution of air and water and the big percentage of land reclamation Malaysia is currently facing a big environmental crisis.

Taking into account the complexity and the importance of the issue in hand it is of the utmost importance to understand all aspects of the matter. If any inquires arise please feel free to contact me for further information and explanations at my e-mail address ([ilia\\_p99@icloud.com](mailto:ilia_p99@icloud.com)).

## Important note from the chairs' team

In order for the chairs to fully understand the dynamics of the committee, discovering any misunderstanding prior to the debate and for the better preparation of the delegates you are asked to proceed as indicated below;

- 1) Conduct your chairs via email and informing them about your mun experience so that they can know what exactly to expect of you.
- 2) Prepare and send your chairs by 11:59 of the 6th of November one position papers for each of the topics you are going to discuss during the conference. You can conduct the expert chair, of each topic for further information concerning your country's policy if needed, and for general guidance when it comes to your position papers (word limit structure etc). You are going to receive general comments during the lobbying for your position papers as well as personal feedback and grades for your papers. The points you will receive will add up to your general score which is one of the factors that determine the best delegate award. If you for any reason fail to send your papers before the final deadline you will not be eligible for any award.

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

### Devastation

Devastation is defined in the Cambridge dictionary as great damage and destruction. When there's devastation, there's terrible destruction. <sup>1</sup>

### Deforestation

Deforestation is the clearing or thinning of forests by humans. Deforestation represents one of the largest issues in global land use. Estimates of deforestation traditionally are based on the area of forest cleared for human use, including removal of the trees for wood products and for croplands and grazing lands. In the practice of clear-cutting, all the trees are removed from the land, which completely destroys the forest. In some cases, however, even partial logging and accidental fires thin out the trees enough to change the forest structure dramatically. The most usual human activities that contribute to tropical deforestation include fire, commercial logging and land clearing for cattle ranches and plantations of rubber trees, oil palm, and other economically valuable trees. <sup>2</sup>

### Tropical Rainforests

Tropical forests are closed canopy forests growing within 28 degrees north or south of the equator. They are very wet places, receiving more than 200 cm rainfall per year,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/devastation>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/science/deforestation>

either seasonally or throughout the year. Temperatures are uniformly high - between 20°C and 35°C. Such forests are found in Asia, Australia, Africa, South America, Central America, Mexico and on many of the Pacific Islands. Tropical forests have the largest living biomass and boast some of the highest rates of terrestrial biodiversity. But rainforests are perhaps the most endangered habitat on earth and most vulnerable to deforestation.<sup>3</sup>

### **Land Reclamation**

Land reclamation refers to the process of creating or restoring new land from waterlogged areas, lakebeds or oceans. The new land, also known as landfills, makes the land more useful for activities such as farming, forestry, port expansion, beach replenishment or construction of commercial complexes. The reclaimed ground is filled with sand, soil or other materials depending on the intended use. The process involves pumping out water from swampy muddy places or raising the elevation of the ocean bed by different processes. Land reclamation method depends on factors such as types of equipment available, type of coastal soil or sand, the topography of the ocean bed or even intended use of the reclaimed land.<sup>4</sup>

### **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is a broad measurement of a nation's overall economic activity. GDP is the monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific time period. GDP includes all private and public consumption, government outlays, investments, additions to private inventories, paid-in construction costs and the foreign balance of trade.<sup>5</sup>

### **Illegal Logging**

The term 'illegal logging' is often used as short-hand to describe illegal practices related to the harvesting, processing and trade in timber and timber products. Illegal logging and the related trade occurs when national or sub-national laws are broken at any point along the supply chain, for example: logging with an illegally acquired license or in protected areas; harvesting over allowed quotas; processing of logs without the necessary licenses; non-payment of taxes; or exporting products without paying export duties. It may also be

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.panda.org/our\\_work/forests/importance\\_forests/tropical\\_rainforest/](https://www.panda.org/our_work/forests/importance_forests/tropical_rainforest/)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-is-land-reclamation.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/gdp.asp>

linked with illegal forest conversion, in which natural forests are cleared for other land uses, such as agriculture, infrastructure and mining.<sup>6</sup>

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **Historical Background**

Malaysia was under British Empire until 1963, when it gained its independence and was consisted of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah, until the exit of Singapore in 1965. Its strategic location on the sea-lane puts the country in a primary position for trade; hence its economy has been mostly based in exports. Tracing back during the years of the British rule the free trade policy that was implied attracted many Chinese migrants that opted for the production and exportation to other Asian and Western countries of agricultural and mining products. The two basic pillars of Malaysia's exports were rubber and tin. As a result, prior to the World War II Malaysia was a leading exporter of raw materials and an importer of manufactures. During the World War II and the Japanese occupation the economic situation changed rapidly, with the abandonment of the exports and the production of only the basic commodities. After its independence the newly formed government tried to form a new policy aiming towards economic development, mainly by expanding the range of products exported and by promoting an economic cooperation between the indigenous people. In that regards, the planning of the government focused on rejuvenating the rubber production and exports with the funding of the necessary means for cutting the old trees and planting new ones. Meanwhile, a significant number of agriculturiers chose the more economical and profitable option of palm oil, which is a main ingredient in a number of foods. The discovery of large deposits of oil and natural gas added to the enforcement of the primary sector of the Malaysian economy. In the meantime, the political choices to boost the national economy created the first environmental issues in the country. More specifically in 1990 the rubber and tin production resulted in a major land transformation, while in the 1970s the rejuvenation of the agricultural sector created a larger scale of land degradation. In 1974 the Environmental Quality Act (EQA), the first pollution control act, came into force and for securing its implementation the first environmental NGO was created in Malaysia. The Environmental Quality Act was a first approach to solving significant issues, such as water waste, industrial pollution, solid waste and air pollution and to supervise the successful implementation of the EQA the Department of Environment (DOE)

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.illegal-logging.info/topics/what-illegal-logging>

was formed. Following its enactment, the EQA 1974 was amended three times, in 1985, 1996 and 1998, in order to adapt to the various environmental changes.

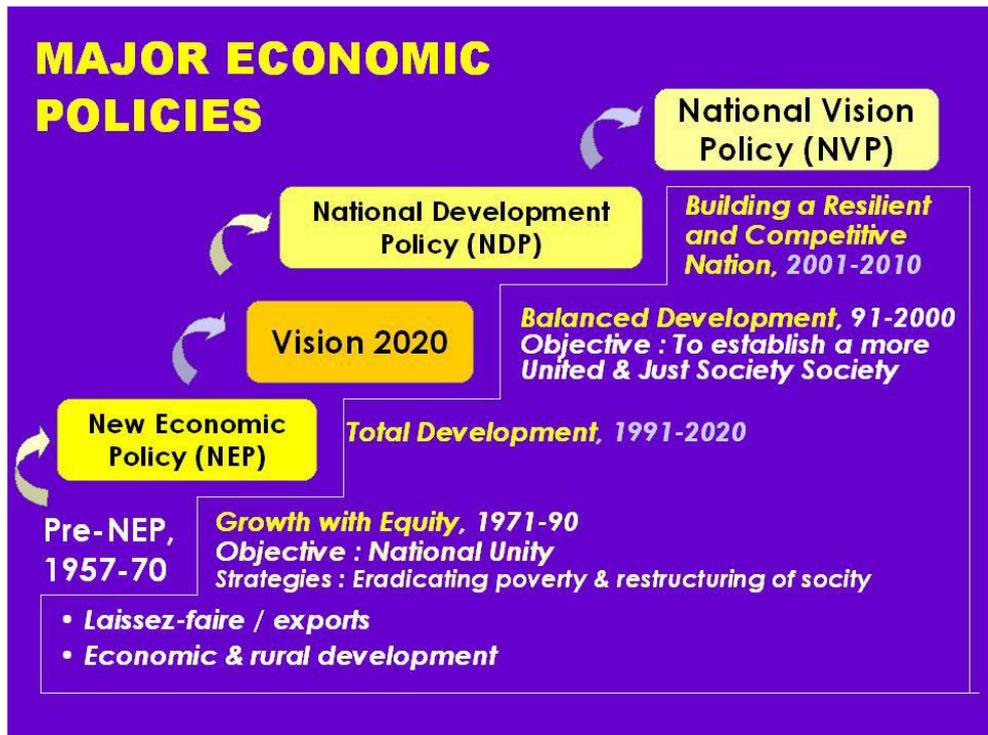
### **New Economic Policy**

The Malaysian New Economic Policy, established in the 1970s, set a new vision of priorities and goals in the economical sector. Its primary objectives were the redistribution of corporate equity targeting a 30% share for the bumiputera, the establishment of new growth centers, the modernization of rural life, the development of urban activities, the raising of the living standards and the creation of a Malay commercial and industrial community. The aforementioned would be realized by the eradication of poverty with the creation of new employment opportunities and the raising of income and by eliminating the close link between race and economic function so that the Malays would become partners in all aspects of the economic life of the nation reflecting more accurately the number of their population. The main emphasizes would be given to export oriented industrialization, with Malaysia seeking for a leading role in global markets. This way the economy would be enlarged, through new investments and job vacancies. In 1990 the NEP ended leaving an open and heated debate in regards to the rate of success and improvement to the national economy. Firstly, the goal of 30% shares for the bumiputera ownership was never reached but their employment percentage, mainly in the secondary and tertiary sectors, was highly elevated. Moreover, the percentage of household below poverty line was decreased, but with large regional variations. In general the MEP succeeded in allowing a smooth transition from a primary based economy into a manufacturing, industrial economy, with the GDP growing by 7.1 annually. On the other hand the ambitious program led the government to the privatization, but its design and structuring minimized the expected benefits and made the privatized entities very vulnerable to economic shocks, while the foreign investments were reduced drastically. It is also said that the NEP favored the Malays in a way that created ethnic discrimination and tensions between the different oriented citizens, raising many political questions. Although, new economical programs have been instituted since, the results of NEP still affect the current Malaysian economy and it constructed the bases for the New Development Program (NDP) that will be reviewed next.

### **New Development Program and National Vision Policy**

The New Development Program (NDP) was established in 1991, in order to reach the goals that the NEP could not fulfill. This program was part of a bigger, long-term plan named Vision 2020 that opts to create a united Malaysian nation, a just and democratic society and

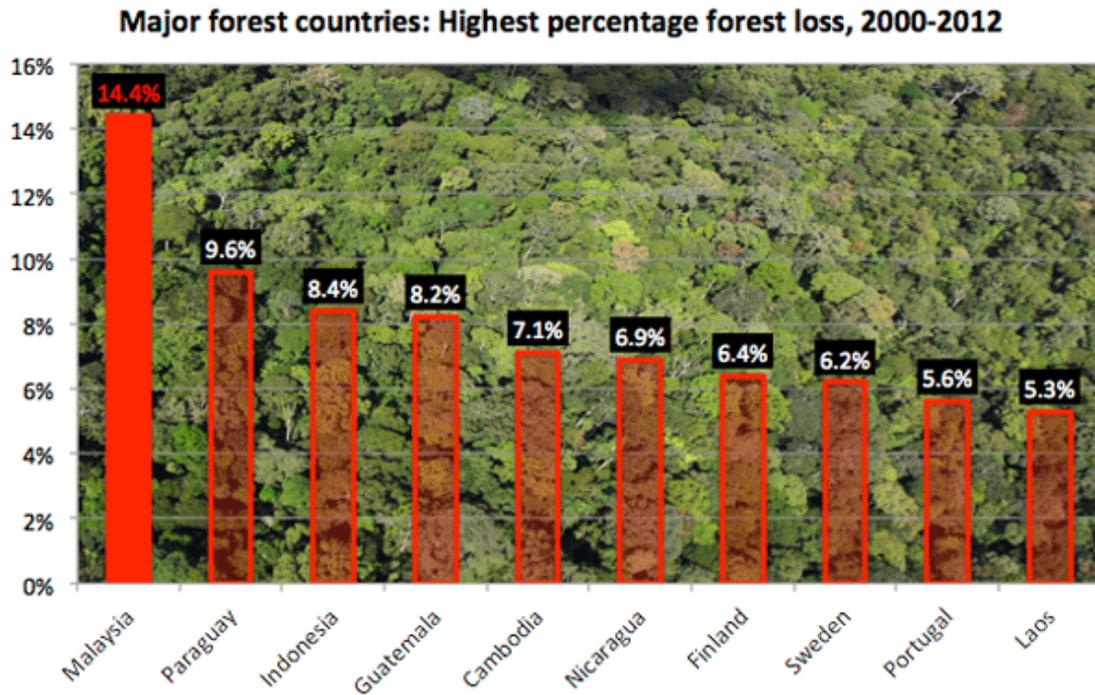
a fully competitive, dynamic and resilient economy, with the inclusion of the sustainable development goals. In that regard the NDP emphasized assistance only to “Bumiputera with potential, commitment and good track records”, according to the government, that required a technological and industrial development. The economy blossomed under this program, with many new infrastructures and investments being detected in its years. However, the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997-1998 affected Malaysia’s economy and there was a major fall in the stock prices and foreign investments. To deal with the crisis Malaysia did not follow the measures proposed by the International Monetary Fund, which were followed by other neighboring countries, such as Thailand, South Korea and Indonesia; instead it chose to take independent measures. The most controversial but effective measure was the implementation of capital controls to prevent the further movement of investments out of the country. After the stabilization of the economy the Malaysian government replaced the NDP with the National Vision Policy (NVP) in 2000, which covers the second phase of the Vision 2020 and has the same goals as its predecessors, namely national unity. More specifically, the NVP prioritizes building a resilient nation and an equitable society, sustaining a high economic growth, enhancing competitiveness, developing a knowledge based economy, strengthening human resources and pursuing an environmentally sustainable development. In general it aims at reforming the Malaysian society not only in an economical level, but also in a political, cultural and technological one. In the graph below we see the various phases of the Malaysian economic plan for development and growth, which will ultimately lead to the accomplishment of Vision 2020.



### Deforestation

Rainforests in Asia are some of the oldest and most bio diversified in the world. They have an important place in the world’s environmental scene because of their vast variety of plant and animal life. Currently Malaysia’s rainforests cover about 59.5% of the total land area. In recent years though the number of forests lost each year has rapidly grown, making Malaysia the country with the highest rate of forest loss of those reducing their forests, as shown in the graph bellow.

<sup>7</sup> <https://slideplayer.com/slide/6414786/>



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The main reasons for clearing a forest are the creation of rice fields, rubber and palm oil plantations and of orchards. In the meantime the population growth has led to the need for more free land for their settlement, forcing the government to clear the forests to effectively address the above issue. As a result between 1990 and 2010, Malaysia lost 8.6% of its forest cover. Firstly, the oil palm plantations, which hold an important spot in the world's economy, and their rapid expansion, have been the main cause for Malaysia's high rates of deforestation. As one of the primary exporters of palm oil, an ingredient used in various products, Malaysia has sacrificed a big amount of tree areas and has threatened the safety of endangered animals to make room for more palm oil plantations. Moreover, the illegal logging has also added to the high rates of forest loss, creating also a big economic problem. Consequently, the deforestation is the cause of different problems connected with the global environment. It poses as a threat for the biodiversity making the wildlife more vulnerable to climate change, hunting and temperature differences. Forests except from home to various species are also the largest terrestrial store of carbon, making deforestation a main cause for increased greenhouse gases, which cause the greenhouse effect and ultimately lead to global warming. Furthermore, the trees help control the water cycle but with deforestation the water cycles are being disrupted causing a dryer soil and the inability to grow crops. In Malaysia there has also been detected an increase of forest fire, due to the

<sup>8</sup> <https://news.mongabay.com/2013/11/malaysia-has-the-worlds-highest-deforestation-rate-reveals-google-forest-map/>

deforestation and the alteration of the climate, which have been the cause of various health and pollution issues. Lastly, deforestation increases soil erosion diminishing the level of crop production and the nutrients to sustain additional forest life.

### **Water and Air Pollution**

One of the most important environmental issues in Malaysia is the pollution of the air and water. The first is mainly caused by industrial and vehicular emissions and the latter from raw sewage and deforestation. Concerning air pollution in Malaysia, the main reasons behind it are the emissions from vehicles, especially since there has been an increase of the use of cars, as well as the bauxite mining that has led to the multiplication of the layers of red sand in many parts of the country. But a growing concern over the years has been the practices of open burning in Indonesia that create a haze which eventually moves to Malaysia, polluting the air and causing many health issues. To better understand the environmental impact of the open burning in Indonesia we need to examine two cases. In 2005 the Malaysian haze forced the government to impose a state of emergency in the country for the first time after smoke from forests fires in Indonesia moved to the neighboring country. In 2015 the Southeast Asian haze, which started from Indonesia and was spread to Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Brunei and Vietnam, alerted the authorities once more leading to the closure of schools and the temporarily halt of travel. The grave consequences both in an environmental and in a health level of the hazes have led the international community to take action against the illegal burning of forests in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the Malaysian government needs to fight the water resource pollution and more specifically the pollution of rivers throughout the country. The sources of this pollution come from domestic and industrial sewerage, effluents from livestock farms, manufacturing and agro-based industries, suspended solids from mining, housing and road construction, logging and clearing of forest and heavy metals from factories. With the addition of urbanization and inefficient laws the problem has grown much more in recent years. The heavy metals contained in sewage can cause various health issues leaving big parts of the population without clear tap water and endangering the aquatic life.

### **Land Reclamation**

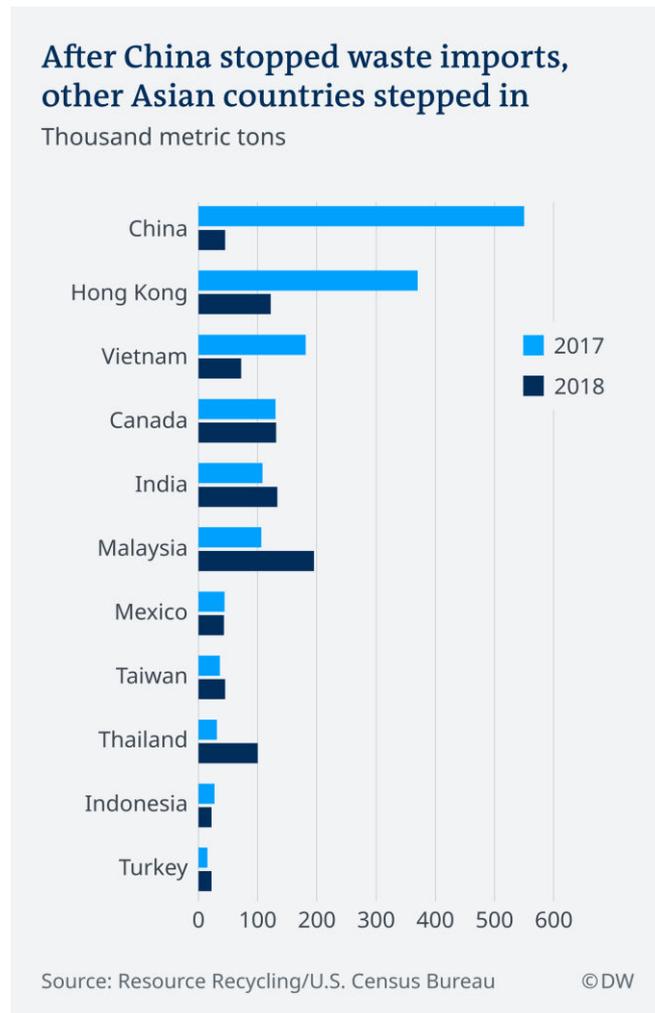
In recent years there has been an increase in the number of coastal land reclamation projects to create more and new areas for cities, factories and agricultural development. The above practice has led to the inability of fishers and entire communities to use and access coastal and marine resources and to the destruction of coastal erosion. It also destroys the

aquatic eco-system posing as a threat to the totality of the bio system. More specifically, the process of land reclamation results in loss of marine ecosystem, such as coral reefs and sea grass that protect the coastal area from floods. We also need to note that heavy metals and other pollutants that are used for these projects cause disturbance to bottom sediments and the low water quality affects the life of the marine habitats. Land reclamation also affects the lives of the nearby residents and it poses a threat to the country's heritage. To measure and control those projects Malaysia's laws oblige those interested in land reclamation to firstly get the approval of the government. The most famous and important projects of land reclamation are those completed in Penang and Melaka.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED**

### **China**

China is Malaysia's top trade partner having strong economic ties for decades. Meanwhile, China had been a leading importer of plastic waste from Western countries, in order to recycle it, until early 2018, when it opted to put an end to the plastic waste imports by prioritizing its environment. The recycling crisis created by China's choice has forced low-income Southeast Asian countries that most of the time lack infrastructure to take over the industry. Malaysia in particular imported 105,000 tons of plastic waste in total and was the first importer of plastic waste. That total was 42,000 (68%) more in 2017-18 compared with the previous year. Other Southeast Asian countries have also had an important role in taking over China's role as it can be shown in the graph below. However, plastic waste can create many environmental problems, because only 10% of the waste is indeed recyclable, causing health problems to nearby residents, polluting rivers and destroying the wildlife. Malaysia heavily affected by China's decision and the environmental impacts of such imports has tried to implement new, stricter regulation on waste imports in order to balance the economic benefits and the environmental tolls. Furthermore, China although it has created its own independent recycle system exported plastic waste that was difficult to recycle to Malaysia, creating new problems to a country with insufficient infrastructure and space for a task like this. The Malaysian government instead decided to return big amounts of plastic waste to the countries of their origin.



**Indonesia**

Indonesia and Malaysia are neighboring countries that have had a troubled relationship in the past. One of the most controversial issues amongst the two states is Indonesia’s open burning of forests that creates a big haze which ultimately moves towards Malaysia creating a big environmental and health issue as stated before. The Malaysian government has put pressure in Indonesia requesting a law alteration to prohibit such acts of open burning and to take all necessary measures concerning the prevention and the punishment of such actions. Furthermore, Indonesia is also a primary exporter of palm oil, taking over from Malaysia in 2006 as the leading exporter, facing many similar environmental issues as Malaysia.

**Bangladesh**

Bangladesh has praised over the past Malaysia’s economy considering it as one of their role models, especially in the field of development. Recently, though, it has been

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/after-chinas-import-ban-where-to-with-the-worlds-waste/a-48213871>

involved in an environmental issue with Malaysia. Plastic waste from Bangladesh was detected in containers in Malaysia. Taking into consideration that similar action have also occurred in the past from other countries, such as the UK, the US, Japan, China, Spain, Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and France. Malaysia is slowly becoming a disposal ground at the expense of its environment and its citizens' health.

### **ASEAN**

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations has taken an active approach on the issue of hazes and air pollution. After a big environmental crisis in 1998 caused by open burning in Indonesia the member states signed the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution in 2002. The agreement's main goals are the prevention and the close monitoring of land and forest fires and as a consequence the prevention of hazes that will move to neighboring states. Its importance can be found in its call for regional cooperation and joining of forces to prevent and eliminate an important environmental issue and therefore it has been ratified by all ASEAN members.

### **UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS**

Since the Asian Tsunami in 2004, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has taken active action to promote sustainable development in Malaysia, trying to protect the environment and restore the natural resources. More specifically it sets as a goal the enhancement of environmental management of biodiversity and natural resources, the mitigation of Green House Gas (GHG) emissions and the incorporation of environmental considerations into the planning and development of non-environmental agencies.

### **TIMELINE OF EVENTS**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of Event</b>
1963	Malaysia gains its independence from the United Kingdom
1965	Singapore becomes an independent state leaving the state of Malaysia
1970	New Economic Policy is launched
1974	The Environmental Quality Act is implemented
1990	New Economic Policy ends

1991	New Development Program and Vision 2020 are established
1997-1998	Asian Economic Crisis
1999	New Development Program ends
2000	National Vision Policy begins
2005	A haze from Indonesia forces Malaysia into a state of emergency
2012	Malaysia's forest loss touches 14.5%
2015	An Indonesian haze affects multiple Southeast Asian Counties, including Malaysia
2018	Malaysia becomes the leading importer of plastic waste
Today	Malaysia's economy is the 3 <sup>rd</sup> largest in Southeast Asia with 4.7% GDP, but with a new government of a different background new questions arise on how they will help the economy to further boost

### **PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE**

Recently the Malaysian government implemented the “Dwindling Forest Restoration” program that has been designed to ensure the conservation of permanent forest reserve areas in Peninsular Malaysia, according to the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment. It needs to be stressed that almost all Malaysian economical plans have had provisions aiming at the protection of the environment alongside economic growth and development. Meanwhile, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has taken various measures to prevent and eliminate further deforestation in the area by enhancing protected areas, requiring specific certifications, producing maps with the prioritized conservation areas and cooperating with the government to detect such acts and the perpetrators. There have also been successful cases of reforestation, especially in collaboration with the private sector, that have an important place in the process of restoring the bio diversity in Malaysia. Furthermore, Malaysia's government monitors closely the water pollution level throughout the country's rivers and is placing sewerage services to deal with household wastewater which is a leading source of pollution. In regards to the air pollution, Malaysia launched the Air Pollution Index (API), which measures the level of air pollution and its effects on human health, aiding at the evaluation and prevention of serious health and environmental

damages. However, the API indication will always be an approximation no matter how accurate, especially since it does not take into account smaller particles and the haze changes and evolves rapidly. The main environmental regulations in Malaysia trace back to 1974 and the Environmental Quality Act relating to the prevention, abatement, control of pollution and enhancement of the environment. Since then it has been amended in 2007 and 2012, but its structure in an era when pollution and other environmental issues were not a priority make its replacement by a new, more modern act a move of the outmost importance.

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

A main point in all countries' policies is climate change and the destruction of the environment, so it is of the outmost importance to elaborate on solutions concerning the environmental issues of Malaysia. The above can be achieved by the creation of a new and more profound legislation that will ensure more sufficient measures and regulations in the fight against water and air pollution, more initiatives of reforestation and restrictions on the number of imports of plastic waste and the manner which it is ultimately recycled. Another point for discussion should be Indonesia's open burning practices and its prevention and regulation than can be ensured through cooperation and bilateral agreements. Raising awareness about climate change via seminars and campaigns can also be a solution to the multiplication of the environmental problems. On the other hand, the committee should discuss about efficient ways to attract more investments in Malaysia, which will help create a more stable and competitive economy. In those bases more measures should be taken in order to reach the goals set by Vision 2020 that will eradicate poverty, create more job vacancies and will bring unity and growth to the indigenous people. Lastly, a primary goal is to ensure a sustainable development that will respect Malaysia's environment while promoting economic and social growth.

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This study guide is only a small introduction in the economic and environmental situation in Malaysia; hence you should make further research on the issue. For any inquiries do not hesitate to contact me at [ilia\\_p99@icloud.com](mailto:ilia_p99@icloud.com)