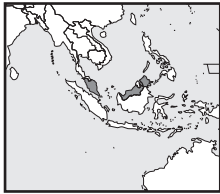


Development at any cost



Malaysians have been vocal in advocating for better human security, taking stands against policies and development projects that impact on their health, social well-being, livelihood and environment. The current National Security plan adopted by the Government (conceived within the framework of the global War on Terrorism), has not helped to alleviate the sense of political insecurity affecting the country.

Consumers' Association of Penang

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The concept of human security encompasses economic, health and environmental concerns. It is, as the United Nations Development Programme notes, an "integrative" as opposed to merely a "defensive" concept, and includes security of individuals and communities as well as territories and states.¹

The appeal of the term "human security" is that it recognises the linkages between environment and society, and acknowledges that our perceptions of the environment, and the way we use the environment, are historically, socially and politically constructed.²

In this article human security is defined as encompassing the following dimensions:

- Economic security (assured basic income and livelihood)
- Community security (security of cultural integrity)
- Environmental security (access to sanitary water supply, clean air and a non-degraded land system)
- Food security (physical and economic access to food)
- Health security (relative freedom from disease and infection)
- Housing security (assured shelter)
- Personal security (security from physical violence and threats)
- Political security (protection of basic human rights and freedoms)

Displacement of indigenous peoples

One of the most insecure and vulnerable community groups in Malaysia are the indigenous peoples whose livelihood and cultural integrity have been severely undermined. The Orang Assli, as indig-

enous peoples are called in Malaysia, collectively refers to 20 sub-ethnic groups on the Peninsula and to more than 90 distinct communities of Sabah and Sarawak. They are all governed by different land laws³ and their land rights and claims are often ignored by the different state governments: the major issue confronting these communities is the dispossession of land. In cases where some of the Orang Assli's rights are recognised, this recognition can be withdrawn in a non-transparent and non-participatory manner for whatever reason the authorities deem fit.⁴

Logging and development projects - generally dams and roads - often involve forced resettlement. Inevitably, such resettlement schemes entail the destruction of a community's social fabric and economic security and force them into deplorable living conditions. In Sarawak (a state located in Borneo) the activities of Malaysian logging companies have caused great hardship to the indigenous communities, especially the Penans, who were originally hunter-gatherers.

In 1999, 10,000 indigenous peoples from five ethnic communities were relocated against their will to make way for the financially unviable Bakun Dam in Sarawak. They now live in appalling housing conditions with little access to clean water, electricity, education, agricultural support and healthcare. With their forest resources destroyed and their rivers and air polluted, insufficient food supply, malnutrition and disease are common. With the best part of Sarawak's virgin forests gone due to extensive logging, the oil palm, pulp and paper plantations are bent on eradicating what little is left and converting self-sufficient landowners into low-level labourers.

On the Peninsula, the Orang Asli have lost their rights on thousands of hectares of their ancestral estates. Between 1995 and 1997, some 2,764 hectares of Orang Asli land were degazetted for development purposes. Less than 20% of more than 600 Orang Asli villages in the Peninsula have been gazetted as reserves. Conversely, the State can revoke

the status of gazetted land without being obliged to pay any compensation or allocate an alternative site.

In 2000, part of the Temuan community was relocated to make way for a water-supply dam for Selangor, the human, cultural and environmental consequences of which can only be described as disastrous. Another group in Pahang may soon follow as authorities claim that more water is needed by 2007.

Today, the struggle to secure the land rights of indigenous peoples and their access to biodiversity resources depends on the communities effectively organising and mobilising, with support from local NGOs when the need arises.

A degraded environment⁵

Since Malaysia's transformation into an industrialised economy, pollution and resource contamination prevail in its environment. Rampant development in hills, wetlands and forests continues to plunder these sensitive ecosystems. Deforestation and land clearance not only compromise the quality of rivers and wetland reserves, but also influence climatic changes.

Out of 120 river basins monitored in 2001, 39% were found to be polluted, and 11% were very polluted. Human activities continued to pose a threat to the fragile ecosystems of the marine environment. The main contaminants in the coastal waters in 2001 were *Escherichia coli* bacteria, total suspended solids, and oil and grease. All these contaminants as well as mercury exceeded the Interim Marine Water Quality Standards. In 2000, the combined air pollution load from mobile sources, stationary sources and burning of municipal and industrial waste was approximately 3.2 million tonnes.⁶

Environmental deterioration has an impact on both the physical and social realms. Unhealthy ecosystems can be attributed to the mismanagement of natural resources. On the human scale, poverty, disease, loss of income and a decline in the overall quality of life are additional consequences of improper resource utilisation and inequitable distribution of the country's wealth.

The social implications of degradation usually target poorer communities and indigenous peoples,

1 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *Human Development Report 1994*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

2 Canadian Global Change Programme, The Royal Society of Canada. *Changes*. No. 5, Ontario, 1997.

3 The Orang Asli are not a homogenous group. There are at least 95 subgroups, each with their own distinct language and culture. However, they are all culturally and socio-economically marginalised. Only 0.02% of the Orang Asli have title to their land.

4 Consumers' Association of Penang. *Utusan Consumer*, December 1999.

5 Sahabat Alam Malaysia. *Malaysian Environment Alert 2001*. Penang, 2001.

6 Department of Statistics. *Compendium of Environmental Statistics 2003*. Malaysia, 2003.

who rely on the sustenance provided by forests, rivers and seas. But not only rural populations are affected; the urban poor also suffer from pollution, ill health, unsanitary living conditions and limited earnings potential.

Health insecurity

The health of the population is deteriorating. About 40,000 new cases of cancer are detected every year. In terms of risk, after correcting for unregistered cases, one in four Malaysians can be expected to get cancer in his or her lifetime. One alarming revelation is that Malaysians have among the highest rates of nasopharyngeal, laryngeal and cervical cancers in the world.

With the number of senior citizens above the age of 60 rising to about 11% by 2020 and the growing prevalence of unhealthy habits associated with an affluent lifestyle, such as smoking, inappropriate diet, excessive weight gain and lack of exercise, the incidence of cancer is expected to increase. According to Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng, overeating has given rise to an increase in non-communicable illnesses like cardio-vascular disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. Furthermore, 25% of Malaysians are overweight while 4.4% suffer from obesity problems.

The National Morbidity Study showed that while the world prevalence rate for smoking stood at 47%, the rate in Malaysia was 2.2% higher. According to a World Health Organization study, the smoking habit is spreading among Malaysian teenagers, with about 50 new smokers emerging daily.⁷ About 10,000 tobacco-related deaths are reported every year. Drug addiction is on the increase: 1% of Malaysia's total population are addicted to drugs.

No houses for the homeless

Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation since the mid 1970s have led to the influx of millions of people from villages and neighbouring countries to major urban centres. More than 35,000 families live in dire conditions in squatter colonies in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Johor, Sarawak and Sabah. It is estimated that nearly 20% of the population in Klang Valley are squatters. The existence of squatter settlements in many urban centres is evidence of the failure of the Government's housing policy.

In its planning and policies on housing, the Government is committed to the provision of housing but the planned targets have not been met, particularly in providing adequate housing to the lower-income sector.⁸ The failure to achieve planned targets is attributed to the current adverse economic situation, overreliance on the private sector, misallocation of resources arising from inadequate control and supervision of the private sector by the authorities. Consequently, in December 2000 there

were 514 abandoned housing projects in the country worth MYR 7.5 billion (about USD 2 billion) affecting 68,340 people.⁹

There is also the problem of vacant properties: in March 2003 there were 59,750 unoccupied residential units estimated to be worth MYR 7 billion (USD 1.84 billion) on the market. About 39% of these unsold houses have been on the market for over 24 months with not a buyer in sight. With better planning and control by the authorities these resources could have been directed towards providing houses for the needy.¹⁰

Malaysia lacks tenancy laws to guarantee security of tenure and this has left many tenants at the mercy of landlords especially after the Control of Rent (Repeal) Act 1997 came into force on 31 December 1999. The effects of this Act are still visible.

Malaysia needs a sound national housing policy to address the needs of house-buyers. Greater emphasis should be placed on providing public housing either through subsidising rented property or building at affordable prices. New approaches are needed to combat the existing inequality of purchasing power among people within different income brackets.

Personal insecurity

The crime rate in Malaysia is taking a turn for the worse. The Malaysian Quality of Life Index 2002¹¹ revealed a sharp decline in the public safety index with the crime rate measured by crimes per 1,000 population almost doubling from 3.8 in 1990 to 7.1 in 2000. Women continue to be the primary victims of violence, with statistics for rape and murder increasing yearly. Until March 2003 alone, about 400 women had been raped and 105 had been murdered.¹² A disturbing trend has emerged, in that assailants are younger, and young girls are increasingly targeted. There has also been a rise in child rape, rape of women in custody, rape of girls and women by people in positions of trust, and the use of extreme violence, in some cases resulting in murder.

In terms of safety at work, the workplace has become a dangerous place for workers in Malaysia. There were 85,869 industrial accidents in Malaysia in 2001.¹³ These accidents resulted in 958 deaths and permanent disability to 11,162 workers. The number of road accidents escalated with an average of 16 people dying daily due to road accidents in 2001.

Food insecurity

Indigenous and rural communities in Malaysia have been steadily losing the land and resources that they depend on for their livelihoods and food security. With the introduction of development projects such as highways, dams, industrial estates, large planta-

tions and aquaculture projects, many food-producing rural communities face displacement and loss of their livelihood. Traditional fishing communities in many parts of the country are affected by the invasion of trawl fishing, which destroys the coastal marine resources, and also pollution of waters from industries and other land-based sources.

Many agricultural systems in the country are currently affected by ecological degradation. The productivity, stability and durability of these systems are being threatened, thus endangering the continued provision of food. The country's food balance of trade is in favour of imports (MYR 13 billion - USD 3.42 billion) while yearly exports are about MYR 7 billion (USD 1.84 billion). About 34,000 hectares of idle land have been identified in Peninsular Malaysia. However only 12,000 hectares will be converted for agriculture-based projects, as the rest were found not suitable for agriculture.

Many of the chemical agents introduced into the food supply, including pesticides, fertilisers, plant-growth regulators and antibiotics are also harmful to humans at high doses or after prolonged exposure at lower doses. As the Agriculture Ministry gears up to make agriculture an engine of growth for Malaysia, it recognises that countries are particular about where their food imports come from and demand the highest sanitary and health standards. Whilst the Government is aggressively promoting agriculture, the plight of farmers with regard to insecurity of land tenure, credit, marketing and the impact of free trade agreements needs to be addressed. Unequal land distribution and the exploitation of landless peasants is another cause of rural poverty and insecurity.

State security and political insecurity¹⁴

In 2003, the continuing US-led "War against Terrorism" created a climate of fear which enabled the Malaysian Government to continue using the state apparatus to quell dissent. This had a negative impact on the human rights situation throughout the year.

State security was used as the justification for detention without trial of alleged "Islamic extremists/terrorists" under the Internal Security Act (ISA) and other oppressive laws. Malaysians also witnessed a crackdown on student movements and political rallies, and further curtailment of an already suppressed media.

The majority of ISA detainees in 2003 were alleged religious extremists/militants. To date no one has been charged in a court of law for any terrorist-related activities, although the penal provisions in the country are sufficiently comprehensive.

In the World Press Freedom Index released by Reporters Sans Frontières in October 2003, Malaysia remained among the countries in the bottom half of the table. Its ranking at 104 was only a marginal improvement over the previous year's ranking of 110. ■

7 "No Butts About It". *New Straits Times*, 16 July 2003.

8 The poorest 20% of Malaysians have access to only 4.4% of GDP. The poorest 10% have access to 1.7% of income. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *Human Development Report 2003*.

9 "Tax Rebates for Housebuyers". *New Straits Times*, 18 September 2003.

10 *Ibid*.

11 Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department. *Malaysia Quality of Life Index 2002*. Malaysia, 2002.

12 "Violence Against Women on the Rise". *New Straits Times*, 8 September 2003.

13 "Enhancing Safety at the Work Place" *New Straits Times*, 31 August 2003.

14 *Suara Rakyat Malaysia. Civil and Political Rights in Malaysia. Executive Summary 2003*. SUARAM, Kuala Lumpur, 2003.