

Editorial

Considering Malaysia's need to develop and conserve her natural resources at the same time, her achievements in conservation and environmental management over the last 20 years have not been too bad. Along with several environment-related legislations which were already in effect then, the Environmental Quality Act (EQA) which became the basis for many of the present environmental legislation was passed by Parliament in 1974. This was followed a year later by the establishment of the Department of Environment (DOE). By 1977, six out of the present 15 pieces of environmental legislation were passed and gazetted including those on palm oil and rubber effluents, clean air regulations, compound of offences rules, motor vehicle emission rules and legislation on sewage. Today, the legislation has been extended to cover noise, lead in petrol and toxic and hazardous wastes. Following an amendment to the EQA 1985, the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (Prescribed Activities) Order 1987 was introduced. Many consider this as an important watershed in the history of environmental management in the country. It marked the second phase of Malaysia's efforts in environmental management and planning. If in the first phase, Malaysia was concerned almost exclusively with curative measures and remedial work, the second phase emphasized, in addition, the importance of preventive measures.

While the legislation appears to be in place and many consider it to be one of the best any where, the implementation, however leaves much to be desired. Both internationally and at home, Malaysia has been criticized for her logging policy. Some feel that the cutting rate of trees is far too high an un-sustainable - not to mention illegal logging. Some others feel that Malaysia, along with the other developing countries of the Tropical World, should stop cutting altogether. The rain forests, they say should be preserved as the "green lung" for the rest of the world. Other environmental issues of public concern for which Malaysia has been criticized include the perceived mishandling the questions of displaced people, the depleting resources and biodiversity, excessive pollution, development versus conservation, developing activities involving hill and island and dam construction, management and disposal of toxic and hazardous wastes and even the proliferation of golf courses.

Internationally, the government was vocal on a number of environmental issues especially a few years preceding the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) - the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

While agreeing with the issues raised, many have its own views. In the question of logging and deforestation, for example, the Government maintains that in contrast to the near complete destruction of primary forests in most parts of Europe and North America, 56% of Malaysia is still under original forest cover - 62% if all other forests are considered, and 74% if cultivated tree crops are included. In a recent Natural Resource Accounting (NRA) exercise by WWF (Malaysia), it was noted that timber consumption on a per capita basis has consistently been less than domestic product used (GDP, NDP or ANDP), emphasizing the point that Malaysia has been living within her economic means although the difference between NDP and ANDP does show the extent to which economic growth has been financed by depletion of natural resource. Thus, while recognizing that there are problems in the forest industry which need to be resolved, Malaysia is still far ahead of many countries in terms of forest cover. And the Government finds it difficult to understand why it should become the target of criticism when it is just beginning to develop its resources to eradicate poverty and improve standard of living.

With regard to global warming of which forests have been identified as an effective carbon sink, the Government argues that we should have our priority right. The government maintains that there are two basic ways to resolve the problem posed by emission of carbon dioxide. First, to reduce the quantum of these emission; and second, to enhance the capacity of the world to absorb carbon dioxide. At present the greatest contributor of carbon dioxide emission is industry (through the combustion of fossil fuels) accounting for 82% of all emissions. Approximately 80% of these emissions comes from the developed countries and should therefore be resolved accordingly. It is also recognized that by far the most effective mean of reducing carbon dioxide emissions is to ensure the rational and efficient use of energy. About a year or two ago, the average per capita energy consumption of low and middle income countries was 0.58 tonnes of oil equivalent compared to a world average of 1.22 tonnes. (Some argue that the emissions from poor countries can therefore be considered as "survival" emissions). In contrast, energy is used to excess in most developed countries. Japan, for example, consumed something like 3.5 tonnes of oil equivalent per capita while the OECD countries consumed an average 5.18 tonnes of oil equivalent per capita. With regard to enhancing the capacity of the world to absorb carbon dioxide, the focus has been almost exclusively on the world's forests. Under the present state of knowledge, and since we do not know enough about other carbon links, this is not an unfair assumption. What remains perplexing, the government says is: Why the preoccupation with tropical forests? - after all, all trees photosynthesize, including the temperate and boreal forest!

And again, while agreeing that tropical moist forests are generally considered to contain the greatest diversity of plant animal species and need

to be preserved, the Government finds it difficult to accept that corporations and other interests, predominantly in developed countries, should get free access to the biological resources of the world a "common heritage", when biological knowledge, biotechnology, gene resources and pharmaceuticals are jealously guarded and subject to transfer, if at all, only on the most strictly commercial terms.

It was under these circumstances - rapid economic developed and its adverse consequence on the environment in the domestic forest, Malaysia's vocalness at international forum and the criticisms levelled against her by some environmental groups especially overseas - that the Fourth Tun Abdul Razak Conference on "Environmental Conservation and Management in Malaysia : Challenges for the 1990s" was conceived. It was held in Athens, Ohio, April 16 - 18, 1993, Its main aim was to bring together researchers and environmentalists from Malaysia and North America to exchange experiences and perspectives and discuss issues of common interest in the light of rapid development and global environmental concern.

Fourteen papers prepared for the Conference have been selected and reviewed for publication in this Volume of *Akademika*. A few of the papers are published very much in their original form apart from editing; others have been rewritten substantially by their authors.

The papers have been arbitrarily arranged in three major headings to reflect the original theme of the Conference cutting across from the definition of the problems and prospects, to examples of some specific management issues from different perspectives and to lessons that can be learned from the U.S. experiences in environmental legislation and education. We hope the array of papers in the volume will become useful to both readers at home and abroad especially in North America, Europe and Oceania to have a more balanced perspective of environmental issues, problems and prospects in Malaysia in the 1990s.

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