

Protect 'our only home'

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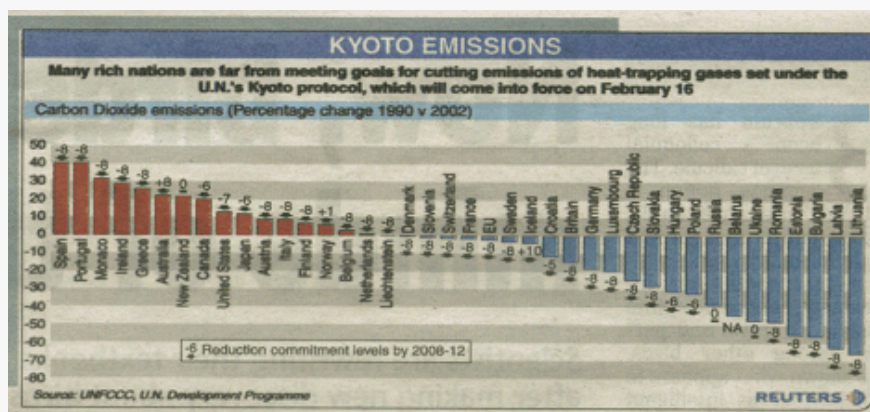
New Sunday Times - 02/06/2005

GRIM headlines appeared in the media last week: Polar bears and seals may be extinct within 20 years (NST, Jan 31); Global warning twice as bad (NST, Jan 26). Global warming near point of no return (NST, Jan 25).

At the World Economic Conference in Davos, Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair during a keynote address last week reportedly reminded the world of the situation in Africa: 300 million Africans lack safe water, 3,000 African children under the age of five die every year from malaria and 6,000 Africans die daily of AIDS (NST, Jan 28).

For many of us, the response would be simply what have polar bears, seals and Africa got to do with us?

At a glance it may not be much, except that we belong to the same globe, meaning at some point or other we will all be affected.



Remember the recent tsunami, and how suddenly the whole world got involved?

To be sure, there will be other "globalised" natural disasters given the crisis state we are all in today.

Here is where our Prime Minister's advice at the four-day International Conference on Biodiversity in Paris last week served as a timely reminder:

"While we can never stop the forces of nature, we can certainly take preventive measures to minimise the impact and extent of destruction."

According to environmental groups, almost 16,000 species are currently listed as being threatened with extinction.

One in four mammals and one to eight birds are threatened with extinction in the near future.

In short, by choice we are putting ourselves, let alone our future generations, at a very vulnerable situation.

As mentioned by Blair, we have to manage and utilise our natural resources in a sustainable manner, to ensure that our biodiversity is not sacrificed for of economic development.

For example, from 1966 to 2000, 23 per cent of our mangroves and wetlands were lost to development.

The relevant ministries, and educational institutions need to act fast.

We need to ensure the welfare of Malaysians are well taken care of and at the same time ensure that our mega-diversity is used to create new wealth.

"Let not wait for a crisis or disaster to strike before we take action to protect what is essentially our only home," urged the Prime Minister.

There is the tendency of acting only after a crisis has taken many lives.

But if we promote sustainable development in theory and practice at all levels, we can avoid all these crises.

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