

# **Deforestation is the major cause of disaster to humans, animals and nature**

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Malaysia is rich in natural forest resources and contributes significantly to the socio-economy development of the country. A total of 54 percent of Malaysia's land surface is covered by forests. Rainforests in Malaysia are among the oldest rainforests in the world with an age of millions of years and contain at least 8000 species and 400 species of fauna. Forests bring various impacts to society and the country. Forests serve as water catchment areas, control temperature changes, habitats of flora and fauna, as well supply food and natural medicine, therefore, they should be conserved and preserved as a very valuable natural resource. Forests help to avoid the tragedy of landslides that claim human lives. This is because the trees in the forests help to grip the soil and slow down the flow of water to the surface which will cause landslides. Apart from that, the forests also supply timber such as *meranti*, *cengal* and *keruing* for house construction and the furniture manufacturing industry.

Unfortunately, lately, we are often shocked by the rampant logging activity in the local press and news. Humans often ignore the environmental problems that arise as a result of deforestation. One of the main causes of deforestation is the timber industry. The increasing demand for cheap timber products is encouraging timber companies to continue deforestation. In addition, forests are cut down for housing development too.



*Deforestation near housing area, Kedah.*

Deforestation endangers flora and fauna due to loss of habitat and lack of food resources. Some species of plants and animals will become extinct due to deforestation. Among the several mammal species in Malaysia that threatened with extinction are the Sumatran rhinoceros, elephants, tigers and Orangutans. Deforestation also results in soil erosion. The soil surface will be eroded and carried to nearby rivers. Next, this soil will settle at the bottom of the river. The bottom of the river will be shallow. When it rains heavily, the river will hold a lot of water. Excess water will overflow into the surrounding areas and cause flooding which happened in Baling, Kedah.



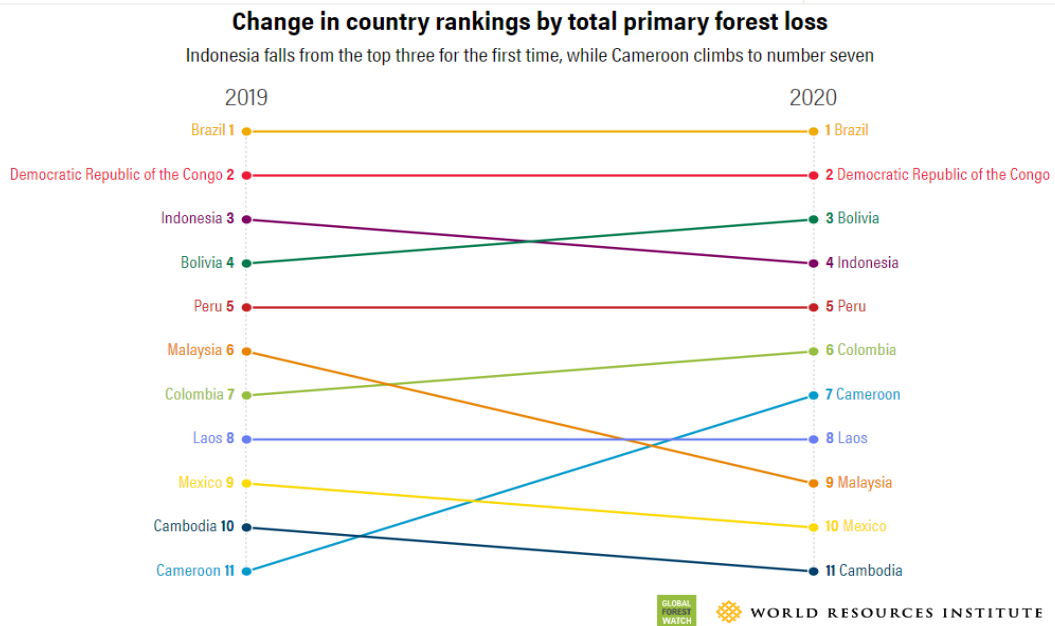
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We were recently shocked by the news of floods in Baling, Kedah on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2022. According to environmentalists, deforestation at water catchment areas is likely to have led to the devastating mud floods which killed three and displaced more than 600 residents near Baling, Kedah on Monday. This is a straightforward issue. The previous deforestation at water catchment areas like Sungai Kupang and Sungai Tiak had caused the rivers to become shallow due to erosion and sedimentation.

World Resources Institute – Change in country rankings by total primary forest loss



The above diagram shows that change in country rankings by total primary forest loss from 2019 to 2020. Malaysia has been on the sixth rank has dramatically dropped to the ninth rank.

The government need to take steps to address the problem of deforestation. The simplest action is, the government should declare forest areas as National Parks. Malaysia has a number of National Parks such as Taman Negara, Endau-Rompin National Park, Penang National Park, Kinabalu Park and Gunung Mulu National Park. Besides that, government need to keep Permanent Forests Reserves (PFR). Forest reserve is a part of the Permanent Forest Estate which will normally be a productive forest, destined to the principal permanent source of the state's supply of timber and other forest produce which admits limited rights or privileges to the local people to utilize the forest produce. This legal action ensures that the area continues to be preserved without any attempt to cut down. In fact, the government can implement an action that, all trees felled for any activity such as housing projects, logging and construction should be replaced as soon as possible in a certain quantity. The government may impose a condition that each tree felled must be replaced with two or three trunks. In addition, the issue of deforestation can be addressed through education. The schools should establish an Environmental Club such as Go-Green Club to empower students to participate and take part in environmental activities and projects. This will help to forms responsible citizens. Environmental education is also able to form a positive attitude towards environment. Besides that, government and environmental organizations such as Global Environment Centre (GEC), Malaysia Nature Society (MNS), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Treat Every Environment Special (TrEES) need to work together to conduct various campaigns such as Go Green Campaign, Environmental Awareness Campaign and Earth Day. This will lead to an awareness of the environment among us.

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