

**If you can't beat 'em,
join 'em:
Malaysia's accession to the ATS**



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Executive Summary

The request to define consequences of Malaysia's 2011 accession to the Antarctic Treaty system has been opened up to a broader discussion of potential consequences. This presentation and report examines four different aspects of this discussion in relation to politics, economics, social and symbolic factors and scientific research undertaken. The section on politics reviews developments from the past and the factors leading to Malaysia's accession to the ATS. The section on economics analyses overall monetary support and the value of decisions around accession, such as entry and exit costs. Social values in relation to environmentalism are discussed, as are the politics of inclusion and exclusion to decision-making processes. An overview of Malaysian Antarctic science is given alongside a discussion of Malaysia's consistent interest in resources. Indications for future developments within Malaysia and their relationship to working in Antarctica, are discussed.

1.0 Introduction

Our key question was about the consequences of Malaysia's accession to the Antarctic Treaty System. We did not, however, feel qualified to speak about consequences, especially not 'the consequences' as a finite, knowable category; had we been asked to investigate potential consequences this discussion may have begun differently. We cannot tell the future and also, a request to name future consequences implies notions about causality that would need investigation beyond the scope of this report. We are not unanimous on this topic but have enough agreement to drop the word 'consequences' from our title.

If the future is unknowable, similarly the past has a way of becoming contested from different points of view. If we compare an Australian version of the last 30 years and what some Malaysian commentators say about the latter's relationship to the Antarctic Treaty System, we can get rather divergent pictures (Tepper et al, 2005). A reasonably uncontroversial outline follows. Pressure from Malaysia throughout the 1980s put the 'question of Antarctica' on the world stage, with the UN discussing Antarctica for the first time in session in 1983. Malaysia started as a fervent critic of the ATS, calling it a 'gentleman's club' and a relic of colonialism (Beck, 2004). Subsequently, Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties moved to invite Malaysia to become involved in scientific research. At the same time the Malaysian government approved and began to fund these activities. Research started in 1999 in conjunction with Antarctica New Zealand, and to date Malaysia has now conducted about 60 scientific projects in collaboration with multiple countries. This engagement with science in Antarctica allowed Malaysia to attend SCAR meetings as a consultative party eventually became a full member in 2007. Moves began to consider accession to the Treaty – which isn't necessary in order to do science there (Pakistan is engaged with scientific research in Antarctica, but has not acceded to the Treaty). Malaysia officially acceded to the ATS on 31 October 2011.

Our approach to the topic as posed was to open up the subject to discussion, considering more lines of enquiry than a strictly legal or political approach. We established several lines of enquiry, which are as follows: political, economic, social/symbolic, and scientific consequences (keeping in mind a definitive answer is not possible). The political section covers a the history of the transition in relation to the ATS in more depth than above, and economics will not only look at figures but consider some wider implications of going to or exiting from Antarctica. The social/symbolic section will draw a long bow to consider

parameters around inclusion and what happens if this is not done appropriately and Malaysia's relationship to environmental values are also discussed. In the section on science, ongoing interests in Antarctic resources will be examined alongside a review of some of the science undertaken to date.

We thought it important to include a Malaysian 'voice' in our presentation and found an online film made after the last King's journey to Antarctica in 2011. Titled "My King and Emperor in Antarctica: Malaysia's Journey to the Ice" is an 18'44' minute long production, mostly about the King's visit, but attempting an overview of why he would go there on behalf of his country. For reasons of time constraint, only two minutes was shown from the film's introduction, which outlined some of the reasons Malaysia 'should' be interested in Antarctica. This included some background as discussed above, and added some interesting facts, some of which will be discussed below.

2.0 Politics

The Antarctic Treaty System is a constantly evolving process. The current Treaty with its Protocols is the product of challenges, discussions, debates and involvements. Hamidon's identification of Antarctica as the 'common heritage of mankind' (UN 2005b:13) belonging to the international community might be interpreted as leaving open the door for Malaysia to revive its longstanding challenge to the Antarctic Treaty System (UN 2005b:13).

Malaysia came in 1983 to present its challenges of the ATS to the United Nations General Assembly and gradually began to participate in its processes. Acceding to the Treaty in 2011, Malaysia will be able to establish its science base and its findings in Antarctica can be patented.

2.1 Malaysia's entry to Antarctica

Malaysia's Antarctic engagement begins with challenges in the early 80s at the United Nations General Assembly. Leading most of the developing countries and several interest groups, Malaysia presented the argument that Antarctica should be designated as 'common heritage of mankind'. Criticism of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea further emerged as one of its initiatives.

The fact that policies of the industrialised countries may be formulated in response to immediate and even urgent internal economic and political concerns, while the developing countries seem to be taking up positions aimed at preserving their rights in the future, thus bringing the groups into a kind of inter-temporal conflict, should not be taken into account when assessing the validity of either of them. (Parsons, 1987, pp.28)

2.2 The Five Stages of Grief

For the purpose of this illustration, Malaysia's political perspective will be explained using the series of developments in the *Five Stage of Grief*: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance.

2.2.1 Initial Phase: Denial

Malaysia's initial phase was to form its argument from an interest in equity in Antarctica and involved criticism of the lack of transparency.

During 1984-88 Malaysia's initiatives focused attention on the Antarctic, just as Malta's initiative in 1967 compelled all the members of the United Nations to examine the full implications of permitting unregulated exploitation of the resources of the deep sea-bed.

(Parsons, 1987, *pp.*28) Malaysia focused upon ensuring that Antarctica and its resources were managed in the interest of all mankind. (Tepper, 2004, *pp.*115)

2.2.2 Anger, Bargaining & Depression

From 1989-92 Malaysia had forsaken its pursuit of equitable minerals exploration. The emphasis shifted from 'Antarctica as common heritage of mankind' to ensuring protection of Antarctica's continental environment.

1989 marked the beginning of a clear shift in Malaysia's priorities, from focusing on the shortcomings of the Antarctic Treaty System and equitable mineral exploitation, to ensuring that the Antarctic environment was protected for all mankind. (Tepper, 2004, *pp.*116)

Its environmental concerns extended to the potential environmental damage due to the intensity of scientific research and requests were made for stricter control of the exploitation of marine resources to protect the Antarctic ecosystem.

2.2.3 Acceptance

In 1993 - 2002- 2011 The Madrid Protocol was drafted in 1991 and entered into force in 1998, giving a different path to Malaysia's Antarctica critics. The Madrid Protocol again fuelled Malaysia's optimism, being seen as helping to protect the Antarctic environment from the increasing threat of pollution.

The real shift occurred in November 1997 when the Malaysian cabinet approved local scientists' participation in scientific research on the continent after New Zealand, in 1996, offered the use of its Scott Base to Malaysian scientists. (Hamzah, 2010, *pp.*188)

Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir's visit to Antarctica in 2002 defined a symbolic value for Malaysia's shift as well as resolving its domestic political support for Antarctic science.

The decision by New Zealand in 1997 to open Scott Base to Malaysian scientists strengthened Malaysia's resolve for more participatory involvement. The success of Malaysian scientist on the continent has made it easier for political leadership to the Academy of Sciences and the Ministry of Science and Environment (Hamzah, 2010, *pp.* 187)

2.3 Theme of Criticism

Malaysia's fundamental argument concerns the necessity for the Antarctic Treaty System to be replaced with a more international, more equitable 'common heritage of mankind' regime. Even with Malaysia's entry to Antarctica in 2011, some critics remain unsatisfied. Several themes emerged throughout the years in "Question of Antarctica" (Joyner, 1998, *pp.* 240-245)

- Environmental Stakes
- Legal Status

- Exclusivity
- Inequity
- Government by Minority
- South Africa
- Mineral Negotiations

2.3.1 Environmental Stakes

As the last frontier for mankind, Dr. Mahathir views Antarctica as a place with a vast amount of natural resources.

“Antarctica is of considerable environmental, climatic and scientific significance to the world. ...Antarctica could also have considerable economic potential in harvesting of living and non-living resources.”

In the 1970s, Antarctic waters were gradually becoming an area of quite extensive fishery activities. The Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties recognised that there was an urgent need to establish some form of regulatory mechanism that would ensure conservation and sustainable use of Antarctic marine living resources. At that time, negotiations on the Law of the Sea Convention had not been completed yet. The first time that the Antarctic Treaty Parties had to deal with the regulation of commercial activities in Antarctica related to its resources was in 1972 in the case of the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals. (Golitsyn, 2011, pp. 53)

Malaysia’s concerns have developed to increasingly shadow the issues, including tourism, IUU fishing, bioprospecting, and liability for environmental damage (Tepper, 2005, pp. 121)

2.3.2 Legal Status

Antarctica’s current legal status has been the product of compromises in many ways. Treaty countries have set aside sovereignty claims indefinitely, for example.

Its legal basis, however, is weak, as the status of the area it is dealing with is not settled in the treaty, and attempts at a more precise definition of that status usually run into opposition from the Treaty Parties, especially those with sovereignty claims. (Huber, 2011, pp. 91)

From the point of view of developing countries there was an argument that: Permanent human settlement on the continent had not occurred. Effective Occupation, a necessary ingredient to acquire a valid claim to title, had not been fulfilled. (Joyner, 1998, pp. 241)

2.3.3 Exclusivity

During the UN debates the Antarctic Treaty group was denounced for being a self-designated exclusive club, without any clear legal authority to manage Antarctica for the rest of mankind. (Joyner, 1998. pp. 242) In 1987, General Assembly Resolution 42/145 called

upon the Antarctica Treaty Consultative Parties to invite the secretary-general to all meetings of the Antarctic Treaty parties, ATCP meetings, and the mineral negotiations.

2.3.4 Inequity

The criticism is about the decision-making process being undertaken by Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties only while non-consultative parties did not have much influence on this process.

2.3.5 Government by Minority

Critics observed that only a few states had opted to become parties to the Antarctic Treaty. The composition of the Treaty's membership vexed developing states. Without Consultative Party membership, developing states could never be party to decisions taken by that group. Such inequities, developing countries averred, were considered counter to contemporary norms of democratic rule and international inclusiveness. (Joyner, 1998, *pp.* 242)

2.3.6 South Africa

South Africa, manifestly illegitimate on account of its racist apartheid policy, was heavily criticised by developing states who felt that such an outlaw regime should not be permitted to participate in managing Antarctic affairs. In principle the South African apartheid issue does not favour 'the interest of all mankind'. The Antarctic mineral regime negotiations gave an extra edge to the Malaysian-inspired critique of the ATS and their demands for a more democratic, accountable, and transparent management regime excluding South Africa (Beck, 2004, *pp.* 210) The anti-apartheid theme carried over to 1988, as General Assembly Resolution 43/83 B reasserted the General Assembly's call to the Consultative Parties to exclude South Africa from their meetings and to inform the secretary-general of their actions. (Joyner, 1998, *pp.* 243)

2.3.7 Mineral Negotiations

Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties met between 1981 and 1988 to produce a special regime for mineral resources in Antarctica, including activities in prospecting, exploration and exploitation. Rivalry over the legal status of Antarctica is still present and very alive. The success of any negotiations on a minerals regime, if any, for Antarctica will depend on whether appropriate lessons are drawn from the positive and negative experiences in negotiating CRAMRA. (Golitsyn, 2011, *pp.* 53).

2.4 Contributing Factors

2.4.1 Malaysian Politics / Strong Leadership

Malaysia's interest in Antarctica has changed, reflecting domestic political development (particularly its concern with national development) since 1982. Malaysia's Antarctic interest reflects its political concerns with ensuring an effective management regime.

There has been a change in leadership in Malaysia. However, there is no implication found from government about any changing position in its Malaysian Scientific research. Furthermore, Dato Seri Najib Abd Razak, 2004-2009 Malaysia Prime Minister, is keen to signal to President Barack Obama and the United States his preference for a more practical scientific approach toward Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. (Hamzah, 2010, pp. 189).

It is tempting to see Mahathir's retirement as Prime Minister in late 2003 as an influential factor allowing a major change of course at the UN, given his personal role in first raising and then pushing the Antarctic issue in the UN and other international organisations during the 1980 and 1990s. (Beck, 2005, pp.224) Dr. Mahathir planted the seed in Antarctica when he came to power in 1981 and the fruit of recognition for him had developed by the time of his retirement.

2.4.2 Openness and Transparency

For Malaysia, ATCP's decision to suspend CRAMRA and embrace the Madrid Protocol had a double effect. It provided a good exit strategy for its diplomatic initiative at the UNGA and a recognition that its initiative had started to bear fruit. (Hamzah, 2010, pp. 189) The success of Greenpeace and active participation of UN agencies (International Maritime Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organisation) and the establishment of the Secretariat for the ATS had also come, in line with Malaysia's diplomatic request at the United Nations General Assembly.

Perhaps it is more appropriate to interpret Malaysia's participation in Antarctic science and ATCMs as bringing about a change of attitude in Kuala Lumpur, in terms of encouraging an improved appreciation of openness and transparency. Before Dr. Mahathir's challenge and after the formation of the Antarctica Treaty System, there was only one country that achieved the recognition of Consultative Status - Poland in 1977. The ATS is showing greater willingness to engage in meaningful exchanges of information and views with outsiders. (Beck, 2005, pp. 224)

Upon Hilary Clinton's comment at the opening of the Antarctic Consultative Meeting in April 2009,

'The Antarctic Treaty stands as an example of how agreements created for one age can serve the world in another, and how when nations work together at their best the benefits are felt not only by their own people but by all people and by succeeding generations. The Treaty is a blueprint for the kind of international cooperation that will be needed more and more to address the challenges of the 21st century, and it is an example of smart power at its best.'

2.5 Discussion

Before the end of this report, there are several points to raise. Without the advantage of divine inspiration, prophecy is a risky business, particularly where natural resources and the state of the world market are concerned. (Parson, 1987, *pp.* 115). Malaysia's settlement in the 'Question of Antarctica' would be surprising, if it were 30 years ago.

The consequence of Malaysia's decision to accede to the Antarctic treaty defines a milestone of ATS and, possibly, it would attract more countries to achieve consultative status. However, it is not possible to observe such in less than five years' time. Vision 2020, Malaysia's development plan, has direct impact by helping to establish and support Malaysia's Antarctic research programme. Entering to Antarctic circle along with current support from Vision 2020 objective, Malaysia look forwards to develop Young Scientists Antarctica Fellowship and National Institute of Polar Research to continue its pursue in Antarctica interest.

The current global climate is experiencing economic crisis and post-political-revolution shaped by social media. Those activities will settle in developments both in civil society and in technology. Resources will have to support this. Areas of knowledge and technology will take time to grow, as, in particular, will nations' interests in Antarctic subjects.

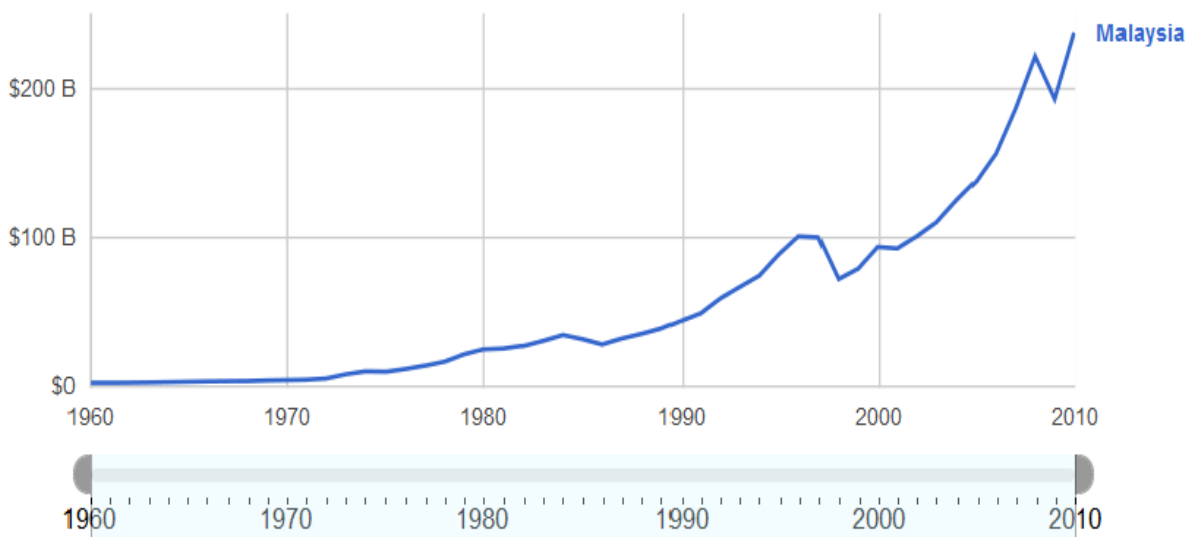
Distractions such as Antarctic subjects may not be on the 'to-do' list. In a short time, there is less possibility to see it coming. However, things might change after three years, say, while resources in polar regions could appear to be valuable and economically viable. Furthermore, disputes in Antarctica will possibly arise when there are more developments in the continent. Many Antarctic establishments will complete in 2012.

From the past, the evolution of the Antarctic Treaty System, Malaysia's involvement has had direct and indirect impacts on the process. The point is, without criticisms or challenges, the Treaty System might not thrive. The problem this session will want to raise in conclusion is – who or what is currently undertaking the critical development of the Antarctic Treaty System? Who could be the next Malaysia?

3.0 Economic Factors

Everyone is affected by the economy; an economy describes how a country spends its money. This is determined by 5 factors economic growth, inflation, unemployment, balance of payments and exchange rates. (Business Studies Online) Economic risk is the level of uncertainty about the ability of a country to meet its financial obligations. (Deresky, 2008) The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the market value of all final goods and services produced within a country in given period of time. (Mankiw, 2004) The Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) is a theory of exchange rates whereby a unit of any given currency should be able to buy the same quantity of all goods in all countries. (Mankiw, 2004)

Malaysia's GDP has been growing on average 6.5 per cent annually from 1957 to 2005. In 2010 the GDP per capita (PPP) was \$414.400 billion, the 3rd largest economy in ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) and 29th largest in the World. (International Monetary Fund, 2011) We can see an example of Malaysia's economic (GDP) growth since the 1960s below.



Data from [World Bank, World Development Indicators](#) Last updated: Jan 18, 2012

Table 1 Malaysia's GDP 1960 – 2010

Malaysia, a middle-income country, has transformed itself since the 1970s from a producer of raw materials into an emerging multi-sector economy. Under current Prime Minister NAJIB, Malaysia is attempting to achieve high-income status by 2020 and to move farther up the value-added production chain by attracting investments in Islamic finance, high technology industries, biotechnology, and services. (C.I.A., 2011) Performance peaked in the early 1980s through the mid-1990s, as the economy experienced sustained rapid growth averaging almost 8% annually. High levels of foreign and domestic private investment

played a significant role as the economy diversified and modernized. Malaysia is one of the world's largest exporters of semiconductor devices, electrical goods, solar panels, and information and communication technology (ICT) products. (U.S. Department of State, 2011) Malaysia's growth since the 1980s has been supported by high levels of investment. Dr Mahathir bin Mohama was the longest serving Prime Minister of Malaysia from 1981-2033. (Wain, 2009) Mahathir turned Malaysia into one of the developing world's most successful economies. He adopted pragmatic economic policies alongside repressive political measures and showed that Islam was compatible with representative government and modernization. He emerged as a Third World champion and Islamic spokesman by standing up to the West. (Wain, 2009)

3.1 Budget 2012

Malaysia's 2012 budget had mixed reviews from the people it affects the most. It's themed as a transformative budget. The only transformative feature in a budget described to induce that effect, is converting a cashless person to a person with some cash through a sudden but temporary windfall. The jaga who is a former home-guard will get a RM3, 000 windfall after which he remains a jaga to sustain a living. (Sakmongkol, 2011) The main feature of the 2012 budget is its cash hand outs and housing aid to lower and middle class income earning Malaysians through pay schemes and affordable housing, issues concerning unemployment, purchasing power and healthcare are unaddressed. (Chi, 2011) Along with these issues comes the fact that not all Malaysians are behind the government supporting science and research especially with respect to Antarctica as they can't see the relevance. For now they can't see how investing in research in Antarctica and getting established down there is going to be better than to put that money towards the things mentioned above. However in the budget only 2.5% of it is put towards grants and science ventures, this includes among other thing work in the Antarctic. The following is an illustration as to how the budget is split up.

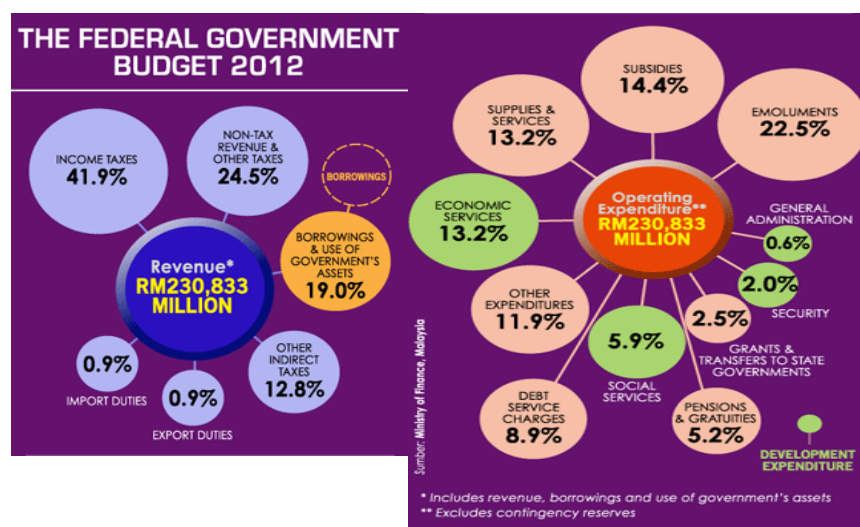
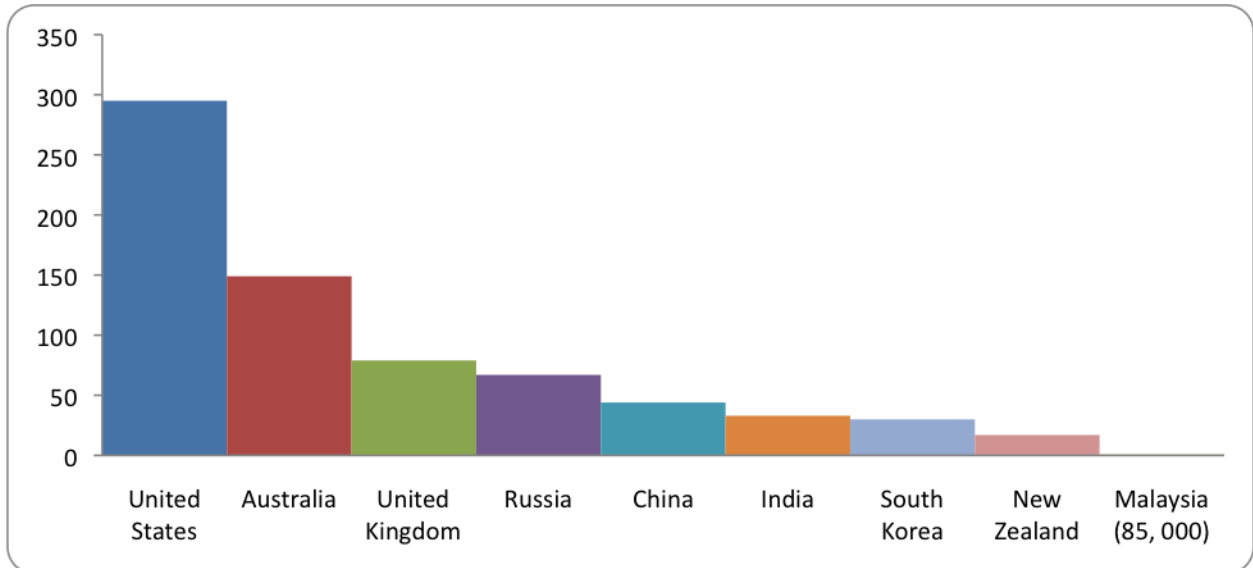


Figure 1 Malaysia's 2012 Budget and how it is divided.

3.1.1 Real spending by Malaysia on Antarctic related events

The Malaysian Antarctic spend is around US\$85, 000 per annum; and plans are underway to further expand this budget. As Malaysia doesn't yet have its own base, logistics costs are relatively low and the budget is almost solely concentrated on science. It is used in five separate projects, working with a variety of international partners. (Brady, 2011)



(United States \$295 million; Australia \$143 million; UK \$79 million; Russia \$67 million, China \$44 million; India \$33 million; South Korea \$30 million; New Zealand \$17 million; Malaysia \$85, 000)

Table 2 2010 Figures: Comparative Antarctic spend (US dollars)

Anne-Marie has been involved with the Malaysian scientists and has discussed with them the decisions being made. “Malaysia plans to set up a base in Antarctica, but it has limited funds and still limited expertise for engaging in such a project. US\$ 3 million has been allocated to the base-building project. The British Antarctic Survey has offered Malaysia its now redundant base at Signy Island as one option and Australia has also offered its similarly redundant Mawson Base. However in interviews I conducted in KL in June 2011, Malaysian scientists appear less than enthusiastic about both these possibilities as the locations of both would be logistically inconvenient and have relatively low scientific value for most of their researchers. Wherever it finally decides to locate its facilities, Malaysia feels that setting up its own base will institutionalise their involvement in Antarctica and will establish a legacy for future generations. Malaysia is also interested in offering its base facilities to other ASEAN and Muslim states countries. Malaysia still hopes to maintain its extensive links with other states so it would likely use its mini-base facilities to swap beds with the programmes of other Antarctica states. Malaysian politicians will seek ways to get political mileage about having the first “Islamic” base in Antarctica and the first ever mosque there.” (Brady, 2011)

3.2 Barriers effecting Malaysia setting up their own base in Antarctica

3.2.1 Barriers to Entry

Barriers to Entry can be the existence of high start-up costs or other obstacles that prevent new competitors from easily entering an industry, area of business or country. Barriers to entry benefit existing companies already operating in an industry because they protect an established company's revenues and profits from being whittled away by new competitors. (Investopedia, 2011)

The barriers to entry for Malaysia setting up their own base in Antarctica and running their own science research largely include the extreme costs involved. In order to set up a base they first have to scout out a suitable place in which to set up. This requires high costs and time to do this as well as support from other national programmes. The spot has to be big and flat enough to support the set up and potentially growing base, it has to have a suitable access point. Not only does Malaysia need to set up a base in Antarctica it also needs to set up a base in a "Gateway" city. This is its support base as it cannot support its operations on the ice from Malaysia alone, it needs somewhere closer and that has other countries around that are also doing similar things. Having a base in a gateway city will allow Malaysia to get support and know-how from countries that have been through the process already. It also helps in cutting down some of the logistical problems that may arise. Logistics is a crucial component of the operation in getting things done on the ice and making sure that everything that is needed is in the right place at the right time. All of this takes time, as half of the year is in darkness this limits the amount of work they can do mostly to the summer months. Every one of these points cost high amounts of money.

3.2.2 Barriers to operation

Once bases and set up is underway and operating to a certain extent, then Malaysia can start to run its own fully funded and supported science events. This however comes with its own set of barriers. Again the main barrier being the cost of operating. It takes a lot of money, time, logistics and man power to keep a base running. Not only at the base itself but also at base in the gateway city and back in the home country. They have to make sure that everything is running smoothly and that any event down there under Malaysia has all the support that they need. Along with supporting scientific events Malaysia needs to make sure that it is operating in a sustainable way that protects the environment and is within the requirements set out by the Antarctic Treaty and the Madrid Protocol.

3.2.3 Barriers to Exit

Barriers to exit are the costs of or impediments to exiting the industry. (Grant R., 2011) The costs associated with leaving an industry especially where resources are durable and specialised these barriers may be substantial. (Grant R., 2011) Once a base has been set

up the decision to be there cannot be changed easily. Someone cannot wake up one morning and just decide that Malaysia should no longer be operating in Antarctica it's time to stop. There is a lot more that has to go into the decision of withdrawing from Antarctica. Guidelines set up in the Antarctic Treaty and Madrid Protocol say that everything that goes down to Antarctica must leave again. Anything that is foreign or manmade cannot stay in Antarctica; it must be taken off the continent and disposed of elsewhere. Meaning that any base built down there must be disestablished and not leave any traces that the area has been touched by Humans. This also applies to field parties and any waste that is produced down there. Once more this takes a lot of planning, time, man power, logistics and costs.

4.0 Social and Symbolic concomitants of Malaysia's accession to the Antarctic Treaty System

4.1 Awkward for fishermen?

Before I visit the Anthropological aspects of our new relationship with Malaysia, I'll just raise one legal matter which could well affect ordinary Malaysians directly. Since Malaysia acceded to the Antarctic Treaty System, it is now illegal for Malaysian nationals to work on boats fishing in the Southern Ocean outside the provisions of the quota system introduced under CCAMLR. As fishing has hitherto been a traditional occupation for many Malaysians this could well have an impact on some who will not be expecting it.

4.2 History

Malaysia came into being as an independent state on the 31st August 1957, just after the start of the 18-month period known as the International Geophysical Year (July 1st 1957 to December 31st 1958) which lent impetus to the birth of the Antarctic Treaty. Yet as Antarctica and the Treaty has a history stretching way back before the 1950s, so too does Malaysia. I'm speaking here of human, social history, not ice cores or rocks.

4.3 Geography

On the map the two arms of Malaysia cradle the South China Seas. There is the peninsula to the West, with Singapore at its Southernmost tip, and the larger piece of territory to the East, on the North West coast of the Island of Borneo. The island of Borneo is shared between Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia. Seeing that island of Borneo on the map took me back to when I was at the London School of Economics in the late '70s, studying Social Anthropology. It was then that the Iban people of Sarawak lodged in my imagination. I'd decided to take a degree in Anthropology largely because I felt like an ignorant Mathematician. It seemed to me that the real world had eluded me. Being one of the first ethnographies I read, the information about the Iban was a real eye-opener:

Anthropology

Title: Restoring Panggau Libau: a reassessment of engkeramba' in Saribas Iban ritual textiles (pua' kumbu')

Author(s): Vernon Kedit

Source: Borneo Research Bulletin. 40 (Annual 2009): p221.

Document Type: Article

Thirty-one years ago at Seputin, just across and slightly upriver from where we met, Derek Freeman told me that Iban folklore "probably exceeds in sheer volume the literature of the

Greeks." At that time, I thought Freeman excessive. Today, I suspect he may have been conservative in his estimate (Sutlive 1988: 73).

The richness of Iban life, lived in the forest, immersed in myth and complex daily practices, struck me as a most wonderful thing. It also came home to me what a mistake it is to regard another 'society' (and I'm not about to go into what that might mean!) as a mono-culture. Closing in on one small part of the whole - like looking down a microscope - shows the complexity and wealth of human life, wherever one looks. The Iban make up a very small part of the population of Malaysia. If the rest of the population has as much mythological and practical heritage, there is very much more to these people than meets the eye!

4.4 Community

We are forming Community, now it seems to me, with Malaysia, in the Antarctic treaty System. The countries which have acceded to the ATS now represent about 80% of the world's population (BAS) and all of us have rich and varied cultural backgrounds.

Shared Values

The values of Wilderness and Sustainability appear to be held in common. We can hope that the rainforests of Malaysia and the habitat of the orang-utans in the Northern part of Malaysian Borneo, which I'm sure we hold dear, as we do the Wilderness and Sustainability values applied to Antarctica, will benefit from conversations taking place in the context of the Antarctic Treaty System. There is a WWF publication available online showing new species emerging from the interior of the Island of Borneo as well as the maps of rainforest and the habitat of orang-utans which we showed yesterday. However, it seems attempts are underway to conserve the way of life of these people and, indeed, of the orang-utans... 'Sustainability', the by-word of the ATS, is quite possibly a value held dear by present-day Malaysians too.

4.5 Mutual Influence

For me, revisiting the Iban of Sarawak, as a way into the complexities of Malaysian society via one of the richest cultural strands in the region, was a great delight. I also looked at some other values that are burgeoning in Malaysia, with particular reference to the Eastern parts, on the island of Borneo. Forming Community with Malaysia will involve ideas and aspirations rubbing off on each other.

A concrete example of this is in the hope raised in Malaysia that the dispute they are having with their neighbours around the South China Sea, about the Spratlys - a collection of reefs and islands, most of which are under water at high tide - could be eased by adopting the model of the Antarctic Treaty System. There could be more "jaw, jaw" rather than "war, war".

There could be an end to hostilities... This is a concomitant for Malaysia of seeing how things are done in the Antarctic Treaty System.

4.6 Hospitality in times of change

Our heritage has its moments too. During the birth pangs of the United Kingdom there was an incident, in 1692, the 13th of February, early in the morning. Soldiers of the Argyll regiment, affiliated to the Campbells, had been billeted on the MacDonalds in Glencoe for twelve days because there was no room for them in the fort. These men were under the command of John Dalrymple, Master of Stair, via Captain Robert Campbell of Glenlyon, and he put orders through, signed by the King, that the MacDonalds were to be put to the sword. After 12 days as guests, these soldiers were told to get up in the night and murder their hosts in their beds. It has to be said that not everyone obeyed their orders. Two men in particular broke their swords rather than commit such an atrocity. They were imprisoned, tried and acquitted later on, and there are other stories of other remedies and escapes too. However, 38 of the MacDonald clan were killed that night with just as many - and these more women and children - perishing in the Highland winter - a white-out blizzard was raging that night - when their houses had been burnt down.

The awfulness of this incident is in our background and our tradition and if we're creating Community with people of other traditions and backgrounds I think it's really important to acknowledge our own place - the richness of our background, the richness of their background. This is what we're bringing to the table in order to form Community:

Rannoch, by Glencoe: T.S Eliot

*Here the crow starves, here the patient stag
Breeds for the rifle. Between the soft moor
And the soft sky, scarcely room
To leap or soar. Substance crumbles, in the thin air
Moon cold or moon hot. The road winds in
Listlessness of ancient war,
Langour of broken steel,
Clamour of confused wrong, apt
In silence. Memory is strong
Beyond the bone. Pride snapped,
Shadow of pride is long, in the long pass
No concurrence of bone.*

It was the abuse of hospitality that made the Glencoe Massacre so terrible and I think we're somewhat in danger of being less than hospitable with Malaysia, maybe... the film shows Scott Base's response - or lack of it! - to the visit of the King...

People's actual beliefs and the values they hold dear are the underpinnings of the social order. It is not always easy to arrive at what these are however. It has been said that there are as many religions as there are human hearts, but we cannot deal with things on that scale. With broad brush strokes we can say that roughly 60% of Malaysians are Muslim, 20% Buddhist, 9% Christian, 6% Hindu. The remainder follow Confucianism, Taoism, other Chinese religions, atheism or other unspecified religions or else no information has been found about this aspect of their lives.

When Derek Freedman wrote about the Iban, it was evident that in that part of the world, Islam was a bit different from some versions in other parts of the world. The indigenous 'animist' or 'pantheist' faiths informed daily life. We have a faint echo of this sort of thing in the way we like to throw salt over our shoulder when it's spilt.

The Old Testament covenant that Abraham established with Ahimelech, whereby people eating together became one by eating of the same food, and which is echoed symbolically in the Christian Mass - the laws of hospitality which were violated by the massacre of the MacDonalds of Glencoe by Campbells who had made themselves guests - are aspects of developing human solidarity which it seems to me it would do no harm to invoke.

I hope I'm not being too fanciful here. Antarctica needs champions with poetry in their souls... The Treaty is a Covenant. We eat the meat together. We share and hold each other sacred. We live, not just under one Treaty, but on one planet.

5.0 The question(s) of Malaysian Antarctic science

5.1 Introduction

This section begins with the premise that social and political attitudes in a country affect the science that is undertaken, and that science is therefore inextricably entangled with politics, especially in Antarctica. Since the signing of the Antarctic Treaty in 1959, establishing a continent dedicated to peace and science (thereby quelling the fervency of national claims and the possibility of nuclear testing or storage), science in Antarctica has had a strongly political flavour, so much so that today it is possible to discuss what Peter Berkman of the Scott Polar Research Institute calls “science diplomacy” (Berkman et al, 2011).

This report may also represent an opportunity to discuss issues freely, without the restrictions placed upon those more closely aligned with Malaysian concerns. It certainly represents a difference to current academic opinion, who place great emphasis on the ‘contradictory’ aspects of Malaysia’s position over the last 30 years, thereby seeing what has been called a “180 degree turn” (Hamzah, 2011). This may indeed be true in the sense of a move from criticism to joining those formerly criticised. However, has Malaysia’s core interests in relation to Antarctica changed as dramatically as has been claimed, as can be seen in the science undertaken?

5.2 Honest mistake and Freudian slip?

Our presentation included a two-minute section from a Malaysian video production titled “My King and Emperor in Antarctica: Malaysia’s Journey to the Ice” (Academisainsmalaysia, 2011). The section we showed included a running ‘fact sheet’ about Antarctica, one of which claimed, “Its polar icecaps contain about 70% of the world’s freshwater supply”. “Fresh water” would be a more accurate term in this instance, and the mistake is likely to be that of an overworked graphic artist (although editorial control clearly did not include a scientific point of view). This comment however could also be looked upon as a kind of Freudian slip, pointing to a concern with resources and Antarctica as a site for such resources. This video does not have science as its key focus, but the trip to Antarctica by the now former King of Malaysia (succession was in December 2011), but its intended audience is worldwide (as a YouTube video, also we used an English version) and presumably, also for Malaysian audiences at home and abroad. This notion of Antarctica as a resource is quite different to the focus of many signatory countries. The sections below will elaborate on this theme in relation to Malaysian Antarctic science.

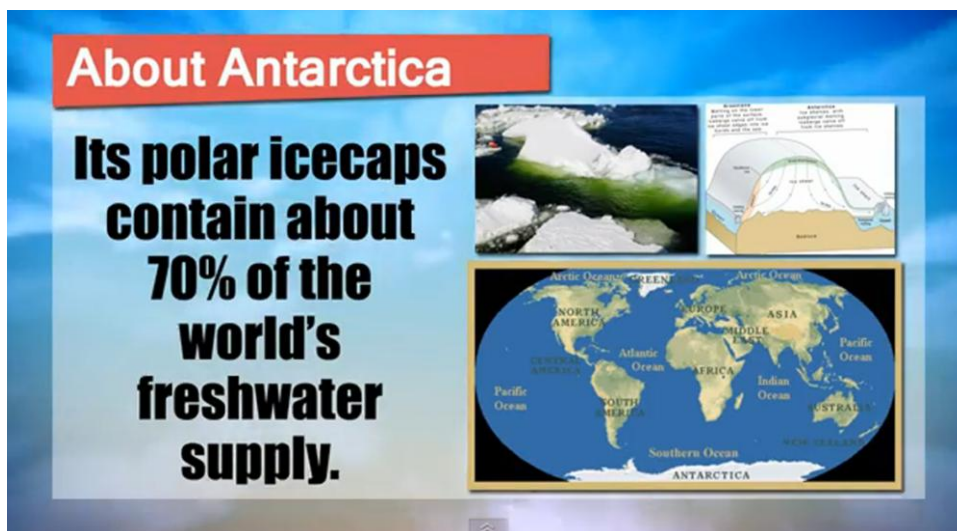


Figure 2, still image from the online video production “My King and Emperor in Antarctica: Malaysia’s Journey to the Ice”.

5.3 The background to Malaysian science in Antarctica

It is necessary therefore to understand the context within which Malaysian Antarctic science has developed. As we know, throughout the 1980s former Prime Minister of Malaysia for 22 years (1981-2003), Dr Mahathir, made multiple calls that a “... proper and representative regime beyond the Antarctic treaty be explored...” (Beck, 1986). Mahathir raised what he called the “question of Antarctica” and succeeded in getting the UN to discuss Antarctic governance in 1983 (Tepper et al, 2005). At that time, Malaysia had no scientists working in Antarctica and even a preliminary visit had not yet taken place. Some of the calls for change were directed not only at Antarctica, but notably also the sea and seabed. Dr Mahathir’s position was likely spurred by two proposals of 1982 alerting developing nations to decisions being potentially made without their contribution: the proposed convention on mining (CRAMRA) and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

By the late 1980s, CRAMRA had been abandoned, and was eventually superseded by the Protocol On Environmental Protection To The Antarctic Treaty (known as the Madrid Protocol), ratified in 1991 and entering into force in 1998. In 1997, the Malaysian Cabinet approved the establishment of a Malaysian Antarctic Research Programme, and a subsequent bilateral scientific agreement with New Zealand was established. This provided the necessary logistic supports for Malaysian scientists to carry out research in Antarctica, and the first scientific expeditions began in 1999. It has been argued however that New Zealand’s role in aiding Malaysia’s involvement was more significant than just providing logistical support (Sommerfield, 2011).

Since that time, there have been over 60 Malaysian scientific expeditions in Antarctica, not

only with New Zealand but with Australia, the UK, Korea, Germany, Japan, and other countries via Memorandums of Understanding (the list is greater but these are the countries listed in the Academy of Science Malaysia's application for full membership of SCAR (Scientific Committee of Antarctic Research). In 2004, Malaysia had become an Associate member of SCAR and contributed that year by hosting the 2nd Malaysian International Seminar on Antarctica: Global Laboratory for Scientific and International Cooperation, in May 2004. This and other seminars, the formation of relevant national bodies such as MARP (the Malaysian Antarctic Research Programme, which coordinates and oversees the various institutes and organisations in Malaysia involved in Antarctic research) and NARC (National Antarctic Research Centre) formed part of the application for full membership of SCAR in November 2007, a necessary but not sufficient step to acceding to the Treaty itself (some countries, such as Pakistan, are members of SCAR but have not acceded to the Treaty).

5.4 International scientific collaborations from 1999



Figure 3 2001 (February 2nd) Malaysian Expedition cover from Scott Base. Source: Shades Stamp Shop Limited, Christchurch, visible online at: <http://www.newzeal.com/theme/nations/Malaysia/Malaysia01.htm>

The first scientific project undertaken in conjunction with Antarctica New Zealand was K352: “The Long Transport of Biomass Burning Aerosols: Characterisation of Particulates in the Atmosphere”. It was led by Dr Azizan Samah who is now the Director of the NARC. K352 developed into K352A, a “Study on the role of gravity waves in the dynamics and energetic of the Antarctic Boundary Layer”; this study and K141 and K141A (concerned with Model Development and Application of Microwave Remote Sensing) together have constituted ten years of working with Antarctica NZ. These studies seem relatively apolitical, although the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MoSTI) publicly describes the work in remote sensing as being fisheries related. Published papers from the meteorological studies are difficult to obtain, despite various conference proceedings and online journals being listed on relevant CVs. These studies are sometimes described as contributing to “capacity

building”, a term indicating getting used to working in this new and challenging environment (MoSTI, 2008).

MoSTI noted work on bioprospecting as a key priority in the first decade of this century, as part of the 8th Malaysia Plan (known as MP8, 2000-2005) and an allocation of RM10 million was provided to the MARP to support this goal (MoSTI, 2008). Relevant research to support this has not happened in conjunction with Antarctica NZ, but with other national programmes. A study on the Biodiversity of Benthic Invertebrate Fauna, led by Universiti Sains Malaysia, is considered of commercial importance to the pharmaceutical industry (MoSTI, 2008). More focused work in bioprospecting is being led by Dr Irene Tan, who has worked with the British Antarctic Survey at Signy Station, and the Australian Antarctic Programme at Casey (Goh et al, 2011 or Chong *et al*, 2011). Dr Tan’s career centres on bioplastics and biopolymers – making plastics from biological specimens. This is potentially an ecologically useful contribution to the overuse of plastics from fossil fuels, although I add the caveat that before Antarctica biota, a key source for her study has been palm oil (Sin *et al*, 2011). Let’s hope the environmental devastation wrought through that industry, for example the deforestation of Malaysian Borneo, is not translated in another form into the Antarctic arena.

5.5 Contemporary Malaysian scientific concerns in Antarctica – bioprospecting?

In an undated paper, available online, titled “Sustaining Malaysia’s interest in Antarctic Science: from Diplomacy to Science”, Drs Samah and Rahman (Director of NARC and key university researcher respectively) write more than once of Antarctica’s ‘global heritage’, even as they try to engage with international positions on Antarctica, as can be evidenced by their title. While few might argue with those words of global equity, they strongly echo Dr Mahathir’s original calls for the UN governance of Antarctica in the 1980s (Tepper et al, 2005). What of the issue of resources? “I have heard that the South Pole is made of gold and I want my share of it.” Australian historian Tom Griffith attributed this statement to Dr Mahathir but gave no specific reference for it, although the comment can also be found in Fogg’s book on the history of Antarctic science (Griffiths, 2007; Fogg, 1992). Perhaps a less controversial version made was “If there are resources to be extracted, the whole world is entitled to benefit.” (Hamzah, 2011). CRAMRA was a defining moment in Malaysia’s awakening to inequity in resource acquisition, and Tepper et al show that this concern lasted at least throughout the 1980s. Is it impossible to see the science of bioprospecting as unrelated to these concerns, is it only a coincidence?

Home - News - Nation - FRIM plans Antarctica Trust Fund to encourage scientific research

FRIM plans Antarctica Trust Fund to encourage scientific research

Posted on January 18, 2012, Wednesday

KUALA LUMPUR: The Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) will set up an Antarctica Trust Fund next month to encourage more local scientists and researchers to carry out scientific research in Antarctica.

Its director-general, Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod, said it was hoped that the fund, when in place, would help cover the costs of scientific research to be carried out at the South Pole by the local scientists and researchers.

"The trust fund will be utilised to cover the costs of research conducted in Antarctica...we would also like to encourage more scientists, as well as FRIM researchers, to carry out scientific research especially on whether certain seeds, which cannot be planted anywhere else in the world, can be planted there.

"We will send some high potential seeds to be planted at the South Pole...the lifespan of the plant will also be studied because we want to see how the mineral content in Antarctica can help encourage the germination of the seeds," he said.

Abd Latif said this to reporters after attending the seminar on the "Journey to Antarctica" delivered by former FRIM director-general Tan Sri Dr Salleh Mohd Nor here yesterday. He said among the seeds that would be sent to Antarctica were 'cengal', 'balak' and other plants to be used for medical and pharmaceutical purposes, as well as food.

Meanwhile, when sharing his experience during the journey to Antarctica, Salleh said the public, especially the young generation must grab the opportunity to carry out scientific research in the South Pole to produce new inventions that would contribute to the country's development.

Salleh, who is also the Malaysian Nature Society president, also proposed for an Antarctica Club to be set up to lure the young people to carry out research in Antarctica. — Bernama

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Figure 4: Borneo Post online article, visible at: <http://www.theborneopost.com/2012/01/18/frim-plans-antarctica-trust-fund-to-encourage-scientific-research/>

On Wednesday January 18th the Borneo Post Online announced that scientists will be encouraged to plant seeds in Antarctica, for the [Malaysia's "development" (see cutting above)]. These seeds, 'cengal' and 'balak', are intended for use in pharmaceutical and medical arenas. The introduction of non-native species into Antarctica is not allowed, except by permit, under the Madrid Protocol of 1991/1998. The 2011 Annex II to the Protocol, which is currently in force (and more restrictive than the 2009 Annex) notes that permits for introducing non-native species may only be issued for flora and fauna listed in Appendix B, and these are confined to domestic plants and laboratory plants. From the article above, it seems clear that Malaysia's intention is beyond the laboratory. The Non-Native Species Manual of the Committee for Environmental Protection, although aimed at preventing accidental introduction, has some provision regarding deliberate introductions where there is potential for escape.

If this plan by the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia will go ahead remains to be seen (and its progression is outside the deadline for this project). It is possible that FRIM has not yet consulted with the Academy of Sciences Malaysia, the body that oversees MARP, or the

local scientists who have already worked in Antarctica. But this proposal – released to the general public via the media – raises some important differences between the ATS’s newest member and longer-term signatories and does give some evidence of a long-term interest in the use of Antarctica for resource generating purposes.

The Malaysian video we showed at the outset of our presentation – “My King and Emperor in Antarctica...” – ended with some notes on the future for Malaysian science in Antarctica. Amongst various worthy entries, such as fellowships for young people, was the note “Funding: e.g., Petronas”. Petronas is a major world oil and gas company, with naming rights to Kuala Lumpur’s tallest and most famous building, the Petronas Twin Towers. Fortune 500 Lists has the company ranked 11th in 2011 amongst the world’s most profitable companies (Fortune 500 Lists, 2011). Their potential to fund is indubitable, but one would wonder at the precedent set and what they may wish as a return for the company.

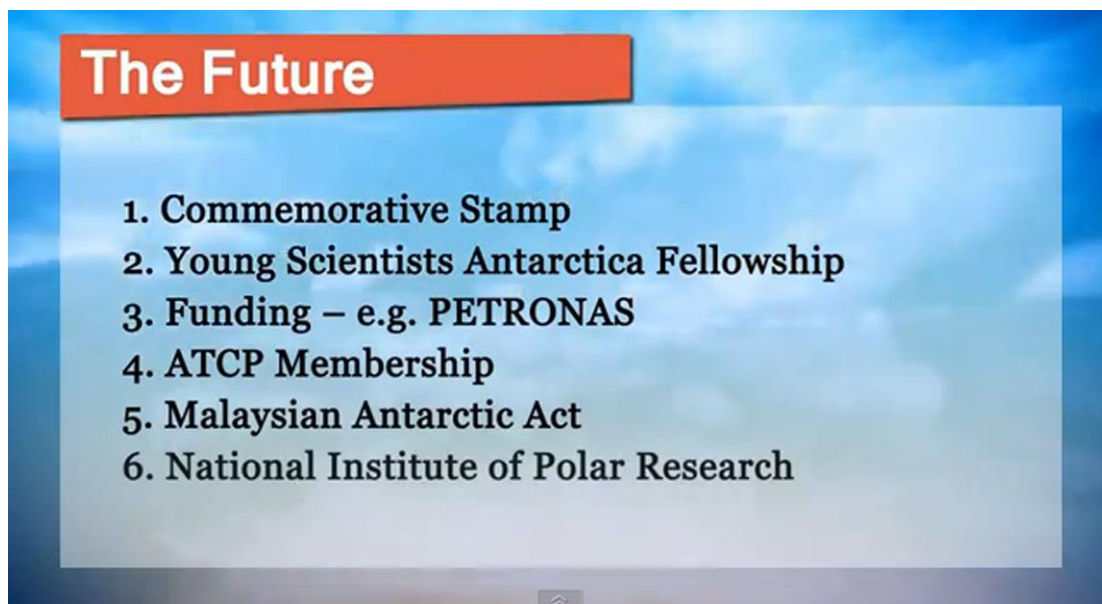


Figure 5, still image from the online video production “My King and Emperor in Antarctica: Malaysia’s Journey to the Ice”.

It is worth noting here that the provisions of the Antarctic Treaty can be altered, if consensus between signatory parties is gained. It seems inevitable that the current status quo will continue as economic pressures rise. The former elite club of treaty signatories may become transformed into an elite mindset only, held by populations within “first world” countries who could reasonably expect their values to be challenged in the future. The establishment of an Institute of Polar Research – one of the last acts involving the former King – is intended to be the equivalent of a centre for excellence in research, further indications that Malaysia is intending to be a serious contributor to science in Antarctica.

5.6 Conclusion of Scientific Issues

Malaysia has remained true to its founding position and long-term interests, which have long been about claiming Antarctica as a common ground and wanting to be sure that if any resources are available, they have equal access to them. This finding has a different focus to commentators who identify the possible contradiction of a critic who has now joined those they formerly criticized. What has changed is the manner – specifically the language – in which Malaysia now advocates these positions, using science as a key to the decision making table. A consequence of Malaysia's accession to the treaty might therefore, from the perspective of science, constitute a boon to key researchers and Malaysian science generally, but not necessarily represent a radical change in attitude or political position overall. This is truly a case of science acting as diplomacy; Malaysian scientists will soon be beyond “capacity building” and may be put under pressure from both home and abroad.

6.0 Conclusion

In reviewing Malaysia's involvement with Antarctica, a lot of ground must be covered. Over the last 30 years a significant change in the level and kind of political engagement can be seen, from being one of the ATS's greatest critics to recent accession to the Treaty. Funding has concomitantly altered to meet the demand to engage with scientific activities in Antarctica, which themselves have developed from 'capacity building exercises' to a large number of international collaborative ventures. The change in political position needs to be seen alongside a consistent interest in Antarctic resources, a position not unique to Malaysia but also held by other signatory and non-signatory countries. The social implications of inclusion and exclusion needs to be taken into consideration when a former critic becomes an active partner in research and our own cultural heritage must be examined in order to make place for newcomers to an established 'game'. While we cannot know the consequences of Malaysia's accession for certain, we do know something about the regulations of the ATS, and the emerging themes of Malaysia's intentions in Antarctica. Whether or not this leads to conflict or robust discussion in the future cannot be known except that the political will of relevant parties will play a role in the outcome. Social awareness of the Malaysian public will be a factor, as will the world's economic state. Global climate change will affect us all but how each country responds to that cannot be foreseen, and the links with Antarctica may be understood as even more important in both theory and reality.

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8.0 Appendix

Appendix 1:

Summary of Malaysian scientific projects to 2008.

(Source: Malaysian Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation).

- University of Malaya, 1999. Trans-boundary air pollution studies (with Antarctica New Zealand).
- Modeling and Observational Studies of Antarctic Katabatic (MOSAK) – Study on the role of gravity waves in the dynamics of the stable Antarctic boundary layer. University of Malaya (in conjunction with the British Antarctic Survey).
- Diversity and Metabolic Abilities of Antarctic Bacteria, University of Malaya.
- Microalgae Biodiversity in Antarctica, University of Malaya (in collaboration with local as well as international institutions).
- The Evolution and Diversity of Antarctic Periphytic Algae, Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- Phylogenetic Analysis of Bacteria and Screening for Antimicrobial activities, Universiti Malaysia Sabah.
- Biodiversity of Fungi from Antarctica, University of Malaya.
- The Biodiversity of the Benthic Invertebrates Fauna from the Antarctica Marine Ecosystem, Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- Bacteria Biodegradation and Bioremediation of Hydrocarbons in Antarctica, Universiti Putra Malaysia.
- Study of the Biodiversity of the Nitrogen Fixing Microbes of Antarctic Origin and Their Physiology, Evolution and Enzyme Structures, Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- Polar Atmospheric Water Vapour/Atmospheric and Sensing using Global Positioning System or GPS, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (this study installed a GPS receiving system at Scott Base)
- Geochemical study of Rock Weathering in Maitri Station Antarctic, Antarctica, Universiti Malaysia Sabah.
- Geological and Geophysical investigations in Queen Maud Land East Antarctica, University of Malaya.
- Model Development and Application of Microwave Remote Sensing in the Antarctica, Multimedia University (with Antarctica NZ).

Appendix 2:

Summary list of Malaysian Science Reports for Antarctica New Zealand

(source: Antarctica New Zealand)

- 1999-2000 **K352: The Long Transport of Biomass Burning Aerosols: Characterisation of Particulates in the Atmosphere** (AP Azizan Abu Samah, University of Malaysia, AP Radzi Abas, University of Malaysia)
- 2000-01 **K352A: Study on the role of gravity waves in the dynamics and energetic of the Antarctic Boundary Layer** (AP Azizan Abu Samah, University of Malaysia, Dr P Anderson, British Antarctic Survey)
- 2001-02 **K352A: Study on the role of gravity waves in the dynamics and energetic of the Antarctic Boundary Layer** (AP Azizan Abu Samah, University of Malaysia, Mr Chim Ah Hong, Technician)
- 2002-03 **K141: Long Term Observations and Modelling of the Stable Antarctic Boundary Layer of the Ross Ice Shelf** (AP Azizan Abu Samah, University of Malaysia, Dr Aiman Soleiman)
- 2003-04 **K141: Model Development and Application of Microwave Remote Sensing in Antarctica** (Mr Tan Teik Eooi, Multimedia University, Mr Mohan Dass Albert, Multimedia University, Mr Ching Yen Choon, Multimedia University)
- 2004-05 **K141: Model Development and Application of Microwave Remote Sensing in Antarctica** (Mr Mohan Dass Albert, Multimedia University, Mr Ching Yen Choon, Multimedia University)
- 2005-06 **K141A: Model Development and Application of Microwave Remote Sensing in Antarctica** (Mr Mohan Dass Albert, Multimedia University, Mr Lee Yu Jen, Multimedia University)
- 2006-07 **K141A: Model Development and Application of Microwave Remote Sensing in Antarctica** (Mr Mohan Dass Albert, Multimedia University, Mr Lee Yu Jen, Multimedia University)
- 2007-08 **K141A: Model Development and Application of Microwave Remote Sensing in Antarctica** (Dr Lim Wee Keong, Multimedia University, Mr Lee Yu Jen, Multimedia University)
- 2008-09 **K141A: Model Development and Application of Microwave Remote Sensing in Antarctica** (Dr Lim Wee Keong, Multimedia University, Mr Lee Yu Jen, Multimedia University).