

Malaysia



Malaysia in the 21st century is confident in its economic achievements and aspires to be a leader amongst Asian nations. Since achieving independence in 1957, it has enjoyed substantial success in reducing the rate of poverty, which stood at 3.7 percent in 2007, accelerating growth, which was an impressive 6.5 percent in 2010, and maintaining a democratic political system. Malaysia ranks among nations today as an upper-middle-income country, and hopes to achieve developed-nation status by 2020. But Malaysia also suffers from a widening gap between the rich and poor, lagging standards in education, crime and corruption, and polarization between the country's major ethnic groups.



The Asia Foundation supports Malaysia in its continuing efforts to promote social and economic development, and encourages dialogue on a wide range of domestic and international issues affecting Malaysia's future.

The government's Tenth Malaysia Plan, presented to Parliament in June 2010, seeks to propel the country beyond its middle-income economic status and improve the quality of civic life. The Asia Foundation is well positioned to support these initiatives, with our extensive network of local partners and long history in Malaysia. The Foundation works with three critical stakeholders: the Malaysian government, the private sector, and the public (including civil society). Our skill and experience in convening dialogs and identifying the concerns of diverse and often hard to reach groups enable the Foundation to promote a more inclusive development process.

ECONOMIC REFORM AND DEVELOPMENT

In 2010, Malaysia unveiled its Economic Transformation Program to double per capita income by 2020 and transform Malaysia into a globally competitive, developed economy. The Asia Foundation is working with government and the private sector to help implement and measure the impact of this effort.

BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT INDEX

Global economic competitiveness is one key to Malaysia's economic transformation plans. But national competitiveness is often impeded by sub-national constraints on the business environment. The Asia Foundation's Business Environment Index (BEI) is an empirical tool that ranks states and municipalities on a spectrum of factors affecting private sector development. The BEI allows local governments, communities, businesses, and NGOs to compare the economic environments of different localities, identify areas for improvement, and advocate effectively for appropriate reforms. The BEI provides a bridge between private sector needs and interest, and government policymakers. The Foundation is implementing the BEI in Malaysia in partnership with Ratings Agency Malaysia (RAM) and Monash University.

The Economic Transformation Program, along with the new Government Transformation Program, presents a unique moment of opportunity for economic governance in Malaysia. The Foundation is assisting local stakeholders from both the public and private sectors, such as the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department, and agencies such as RAM, to think strategically about potential reforms within the local economic environment.



MALAYSIA

The Asia Foundation has had programs in Malaysia since 1954. Our Malaysian office was established in 1957.

In 2010, Malaysia unveiled its Economic Transformation Program to double per capita income by 2020.

Books for Asia has distributed over 2 million books to Malaysian schools, libraries, and other institutions since independence in 1957.

POLITICAL REFORM

2010 also saw the introduction of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's Government Transformation Program, which offers a blueprint for realizing his "1Malaysia" vision of a harmonious and democratic, ethnically plural society. The Asia Foundation is working to support Malaysians in various aspects of the democratic process.

ELECTIONS

Although Malaysia is a well-established democracy, reservations persist about the integrity and transparency of the electoral process at both national and state levels. The Asia Foundation has long worked to improve the transparency and accountability of the electoral process in Malaysia. Our efforts include voter education in poor communities in Sabah and Sarawak, election monitoring during the general election and several by-elections, and public opinion polling to gauge the views of Malaysian youth on social and political issues, including the election process. The Foundation is currently engaged in a three-year program to (1) improve the quality and transparency of the electoral roll, (2) increase voters' access to information on registration and polling procedures, (3) improve the efficiency and integrity of campaign and election-day operations, and (4) increase the credibility of absentee voting procedures. There is widespread support in government and the public for reform in these areas. This trend in public sentiment, and the government's broadly stated commitment to improving governance and the quality of its institutions, provide a conducive environment for the Foundation's work.

ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

The Malaysian government has publicly affirmed its commitment to a peaceful, multicultural Malaysia, as embodied in the Prime Minister's "1Malaysia" vision. In this context, The Asia Foundation has implemented a two-year national dialogue on Islam and Democracy, offering the opportunity for Malaysians from various back-

grounds and every state to hold frank discussions with fellow citizens on good governance, religious tolerance, and the rights of minorities and women in relation to Islam. Fourteen public dialogs held across 13 states involving 717 participants, 60 percent of them Muslims, allowed Muslim and non-Muslim Malaysians to explore the meaning of democracy from an Islamic perspective. The diverse views expressed were captured and shared with Malaysian policymakers through policy papers and government roundtables.

SUPPORTING DEVELOPMENT IN EAST MALAYSIA

Though rich in resources, the East Malaysia state of Sabah has lagging social indicators. Sabah has the highest rates of poverty in the country, and is a hot spot for transborder crime. Recognizing the importance of Sabah's development for Malaysian political, economic, and social stability, The Asia Foundation works with local organizations to address these development challenges. Young Voices of Borneo, part of our community journalist program, provides youthful insight into critical local issues such as land rights and environmental preservation. Voter education has enabled more Sabahans to understand and exercise their rights as voters and citizens. Our regional security program with local leaders and communities helps improve safety and security for Sabah's vulnerable border villages. And our Books for Asia program has provided valuable educational resources to hard-to-reach schools and childrens' homes.

BOOKS FOR ASIA

Books for Asia in Malaysia targets primary and secondary schools for underserved communities and in hard to reach areas. In 2010 19,332 books were distributed to 677 schools. This included remote public schools and special schools for stateless children in Sabah and Sarawak, plantation community schools and *Musleh* (Islamic) schools.

The Asia Foundation is a private, non-profit, non-governmental organization. Through its programs, the Foundation builds leadership, improves policies, and strengthens institutions to foster greater openness and shared prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. It is funded by contributions from corporations, foundations, individuals, and governmental organizations in the U.S., Europe, Canada, Australia, and Asia, and an annual appropriation from the U.S. Congress.



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