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# Nik Nazmi planting seeds of change in climate leadership

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BOOK LAUNCH

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**THE** national launch of *Saving the Planet — Climate and Environmental Lessons from Malaysia and Beyond* took place on Jan 11.

This book by Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad offers insights into his journey as a young political figure.

Since assuming the role in December 2022, Nik Nazmi has faced a baptism of fire, navigating the complexities of environmental governance at national and global levels.

His work has spanned pressing issues, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, microplastic pollution and politically charged federal-state conflicts over forests, land and water.

These challenges go back decades and were taken up at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, where two landmark multilateral treaties were signed: the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

At that time, Nik Nazmi was just 10. These treaties address twin threats that are intricately linked.

For instance, climate change



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accelerates biodiversity loss, while nature-based solutions are key to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Fast forward 30 years: the Intergovernmental Platform on Science-Policy Advice on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services has warned that about one million species are at risk of extinction due to human activities.

Alarmed by this crisis, the global community pledged in December 2022 to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), an ambitious goal to be realised within just five years.

Meanwhile, global tempera-

tures continue to rise due to the reliance on fossil fuels.

Despite progress since the 2015 Paris Climate Accords, the consequences are severe. Recent reports declared 2024 the hottest year in recorded history.

The 2007 Nobel Peace Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns of a new era of climate chaos, marked by floods, storms and wildfires.

This has been most vividly illustrated by wildfires in Southern California that have destroyed thousands of buildings, claimed dozens of lives, and caused US\$250 billion to US\$275 billion in damage.

Malaysia has also faced climate-induced disasters. The December 2021 floods resulted in 54 deaths, displaced more than 71,000 residents, and affected more than 125,000 people.

Damage to homes, infrastructure and businesses totalled RM6 billion.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres said: "It is essential to act now to prevent chaotic climate breakdown", calling for greater coordination on the interlinked environmental crises.

This is the challenging land-

scape Nik Nazmi entered as minister, and he has risen to the occasion in remarkable fashion.

His book documents his efforts, including his advocacy for climate justice through the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR).

This principle acknowledges that while all nations share a responsibility to combat climate change, their obligations differ based on development levels, historical contributions and current capacities.

Nik Nazmi has emphasised the need for industrialised nations — those historically responsible for much of global warming — to provide financial support to developing countries that disproportionately bear the brunt of climate disasters.

Malaysia has long championed CBDR, a principle introduced at the Earth Summit.

However, it remains hard to implement, as evidenced by the relatively paltry US\$200 billion provided for climate adaptation and mitigation in developing countries, far short of the US\$3 trillion needed annually.

Throughout his book, Nik Nazmi shares examples of engage-

ment with global leaders on environmental sustainability.

For example, while Malaysia accounts for just 0.77 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, it has been a responsible global citizen.

The country aims to reduce its economy-wide carbon intensity by 45 per cent against GDP by 2030 (compared with 2005 levels) and aspires to net-zero emissions by 2050.

Nik Nazmi's strength lies in his ability to build on the positive policies of his predecessors.

He has introduced new, forward-thinking initiatives, recognised by Guterres himself, who commended Malaysia for being one of the first countries to integrate the GBF into its National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.

As a long-time advocate for environmental sustainability, I am confident that under Nik Nazmi's tenure, Malaysia will reclaim its prominent role on the global stage.

The writer is the founding director of the International Institute of Science Diplomacy and Sustainability at UCSI University