The 2000 census shows Malaysia's population has reached 22.2 million, an increase of more than 3.8 million from the 18.4 million recorded in 1991. The census also reveals that being controlled, the population of Malaysia will continue to increase at a slower rate in the future. By the year 2020, the population is projected to increase to approximately 33.4 million (Figure 1). On the other hand, improvements in mortality levels and the subsequent longer life expectancies have brought about an increase in the number and proportion of aged persons.

With the continuing decline in fertility, relatively low level of mortality and the inflow of international migrants, the overall population growth rate during the same period dropped to 2.6 percent per annum from 2.64 percent in 1991.

In terms of age structure, the proportion of the population aged below 15 years declined from 44.9 percent in 1970 to 36.5 percent in 1991 and is expected to decline further to 30.5 percent by the year 2020 due to the drop in fertility population (65 years and above) from 3.1 percent in 1970 to 3.7 percent in 1991. It is projected that the population of those aged 65 and above will increase from the current 4 percent to about 7 percent by the year 2020. During the same period, the proportion of the popu-
lation in the working age-group of 15-64 years has increased.

The resulting changes in the age composition of the population has both positive and negative aspects. Over this period, the child dependency ratio, that is the ratio of children under age 15 to persons in the age 15-64 group had declined from 98 percent in 1950 to about 60 percent in 2000.

At the same time, Malaysia, like several other countries in the region, will benefit from the demographic change whereby the proportion of working age group has been increasing from 52 percent in 1970 to 58 percent in 1995. Currently, this group constitutes about 60 percent and assuming fertility continues to decline as projected, this proportion will continue to increase, and will reach almost 64 percent by the year 2020.

It is worth noting that the demographic balance has shifted in favour of persons in the higher working age group of 25-64 years (Figure 2). The working age population compared with the older and younger dependents will give Malaysia a demographic bonus in the form of a productive workforce in the future.

These changes will ultimately result in a significant increase in the proportion of elderly population, when today’s bulge in the working-age population becomes tomorrow’s bulge in elderly population.

Figure 2: Percentage Distribution of Population by Age Group and Sex, Malaysia, 2000 and 2020.


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