Passage 1 - Living With Water: Flood Mitigation in Malaysian Cities

Few images are as familiar to Malaysians as a road turned into a brown river after an afternoon downpour. Flash floods in Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam and George Town are frequently blamed on unusually heavy rain, yet meteorological records suggest that the intensity of tropical storms has changed far less than the surface of the cities themselves. Over three decades, permeable ground has been steadily replaced by roads, car parks and roofs. Rain that once soaked slowly into soil now arrives at the drains within minutes, and a drainage network designed for a smaller, greener town is asked to carry the runoff of a metropolis. The problem, in other words, is less a problem of weather than a problem of engineering and planning.

The conventional response has been to build bigger channels. Concrete-lined monsoon drains, deepened rivers and pumping stations were meant to move water away from built-up areas as rapidly as possible. This philosophy produced one genuinely remarkable structure, the Stormwater Management and Road Tunnel, which diverts floodwater beneath the capital during severe storms. Such projects, however, are expensive and finite in capacity. Worse, accelerating water downstream simply relocates the burden: districts on the lower reaches of a river receive a sharper, faster flood peak than they would have faced naturally. Engineers now describe this as displacing a problem rather than solving it.

A newer approach asks planners to slow water down instead. Retention ponds, restored wetlands, roadside bioswales, permeable pavements and rooftop gardens all hold a portion of the rainfall where it falls, releasing it gradually over several hours. Individually these features are modest; collectively they can shave a significant volume off the peak flow reaching a river. Several local councils have begun requiring new developments to detain a share of their own runoff on site, and a handful of housing schemes now treat a landscaped pond as an amenity rather than an obstacle to profitable land use. The Netherlands and Singapore have shown that such measures can be attractive as well as functional.

None of this removes the need for maintenance and enforcement. Drains choked with plastic waste and construction silt will overflow regardless of their design, and hillside clearing above a town continues to send mud into channels meant for water alone. Flood mitigation therefore depends on three things working together: infrastructure of adequate capacity, development rules that are actually enforced, and residents who understand that a blocked culvert is everybody's business. Cities cannot be made rainproof. They can, with patience, be made resilient enough that a heavy afternoon is an inconvenience rather than a disaster.

Passage 1 - Living With Water: Flood Mitigation in Malaysian Cities

Comprehension Questions

1. What is the main idea of the passage?

A. Urban flooding is driven mainly by how cities are built and managed, so mitigation requires drainage capacity, enforced planning rules and public cooperation together
B. Malaysian rainfall has become far heavier over the past three decades and drainage cannot keep up
C. The Stormwater Management and Road Tunnel has solved flooding in the capital
D. Retention ponds should replace all concrete drains in Malaysian cities

2. According to paragraph 1, why does rainwater now reach the drains so quickly?

A. Tropical storms have become far more intense than before
B. Monsoon drains have been deliberately widened
C. Permeable ground has been replaced by roads, car parks and roofs
D. Rivers have been deepened by engineers

3. The word 'displacing' in paragraph 2 most nearly means

A. eliminating completely
B. moving to another place
C. reducing in size
D. storing for later use

4. Which of the following is NOT mentioned as a way of slowing water down?

A. Roadside bioswales
B. Permeable pavements
C. Restored wetlands
D. Underground water tanks beneath every house

5. It can be inferred from paragraph 3 that developers have traditionally viewed landscaped ponds as

A. a waste of land that could otherwise be sold or built on
B. the cheapest possible flood defence
C. a legal requirement in every local council area
D. more effective than any concrete drain

6. The writer's attitude towards making cities completely flood-free is best described as

A. enthusiastic and certain
B. bitter and accusing
C. realistic but hopeful
D. indifferent and detached

Academic Word Bank

WORD	MEANING	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
permeable	able to let liquid pass through it	The garden path was paved with permeable bricks so rainwater could soak into the soil.
runoff	rainwater that flows over the ground instead of sinking into it	Heavy runoff from the hillside filled the drain within minutes.
mitigation	action taken to make something harmful less serious	The council spent millions on flood mitigation before the monsoon season.
detain	to hold something back for a period of time	The new pond was built to detain rainwater for several hours after a storm.
resilient	able to recover quickly after damage or difficulty	A resilient town returns to normal a day after the water goes down.

Passage 3 - The Longer Life: Malaysia and the Care of Older People

Malaysia is expected to become an aged nation within the next decade, meaning that more than fifteen per cent of its population will be over sixty. This is, first of all, an achievement. Longer lives are the product of clean water, childhood immunisation, better nutrition and hospitals that treat conditions which once killed quietly. Yet the same statistic carries an arithmetic that policymakers cannot ignore. As the share of older citizens rises and the birth rate falls, fewer working adults support each retiree, and the systems built for a young country begin to strain in ways that are not always visible from year to year.

The strain shows most clearly inside families. The traditional expectation that adult children will house and care for ageing parents remains strong, but the conditions that made it workable have quietly disappeared. Households are smaller, so the duty falls on one or two people rather than six. Adult children migrate to cities for work while parents remain in kampung or small towns, and dual-income couples have no member available at home during the day. The result is a growing population of family caregivers, disproportionately women, who reduce their working hours or leave employment altogether. Their labour is unpaid, largely uncounted in national statistics, and physically and emotionally demanding over years rather than weeks.

Formal alternatives exist but are unevenly developed. Private nursing homes vary widely in quality, and monthly fees put the better ones beyond most middle-income families. Day-care centres for older adults, which allow a parent to be supervised and socially engaged while children work, remain concentrated in larger towns. Community nursing, home visits and geriatric specialists are all in short supply relative to demand, and geriatrics attracts fewer medical graduates than more prestigious fields. Meanwhile the retirement savings picture is sobering: a large share of contributors reach fifty-five with balances that would be exhausted within a few years of modest spending.

Sensible responses are neither exotic nor especially expensive. Housing that allows an older person to remain safely at home, with level entrances, grab bars and adequate lighting, prevents the falls that begin so many downward spirals. Respite services that give a caregiver a genuine weekly break reduce burnout and delay institutional care. Training more community nurses is cheaper than building hospitals. Above all, older people themselves are not merely a cost to be managed; many wish to keep working, volunteering and teaching, and employers who dismiss applicants over sixty discard experience that is difficult to replace. A society that plans early will find ageing manageable. One that waits will discover the bill arriving all at once.

Passage 3 - The Longer Life: Malaysia and the Care of Older People

Comprehension Questions

1. The word 'sobering' in paragraph 3 most nearly means

A. encouraging
B. confusing
C. making one feel serious and concerned
D. difficult to measure

2. According to paragraph 2, why has the tradition of children caring for parents become harder to sustain?

A. Households are smaller, children migrate to cities, and both partners work
B. Older people now prefer to live in nursing homes
C. The law no longer requires children to support parents
D. Medical care has become too costly for families

3. Which of the following is NOT mentioned as a shortage in the formal care system?

A. Community nursing
B. Geriatric specialists
C. Day-care centres outside larger towns
D. Public hospital beds for emergency surgery

4. It can be inferred that the writer regards family caregivers as

A. adequately supported by existing services
B. doing valuable work that society largely fails to recognise
C. the main cause of rising healthcare costs
D. unwilling to accept help from outside the family

5. What is the main point of the final paragraph?

A. Nursing homes should be expanded as quickly as possible
B. Practical, affordable measures taken early can make ageing manageable
C. Older workers should retire promptly to make room for the young
D. Ageing is a problem no country has ever handled successfully

6. The writer's tone throughout the passage is best described as

A. concerned but constructive
B. nostalgic and sentimental
C. alarmed and despairing
D. humorous and light-hearted

Academic Word Bank

WORD	MEANING	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
immunisation	protecting people from disease by giving them vaccines	Childhood immunisation has almost removed measles from the district.
disproportionately	in a way that is much larger for one group than would be fair or expected	Night shifts fall disproportionately on the youngest nurses.
respite	a short rest from something difficult or tiring	A weekend of respite allowed the daughter to sleep properly for once.
burnout	extreme tiredness caused by working too hard for too long	Constant caregiving without a break often ends in burnout.
exhausted	completely used up	Their savings were exhausted after two years of medical bills.

Passage 4 - The Machine in the Classroom: AI and Learning

When generative artificial intelligence reached ordinary users, schools reacted with a familiar mixture of panic and prohibition. Essays could now be produced in seconds; assignments set for decades appeared suddenly worthless. Detection software was purchased, bans were announced, and a good deal of energy went into policing rather than teaching. Two years later the mood in many education systems, including Malaysia's, has shifted. Detection tools proved unreliable, wrongly accusing some students while missing lightly edited machine text, and blanket bans proved unenforceable outside the school gate. Attention has moved to a harder and more useful question: what should students learn now that a competent draft costs nothing?

The strongest case for these tools is individual attention. A class of forty moves at one pace, and a student who has not understood indices in week three will struggle for the rest of the year. Adaptive systems can pose endless practice questions at the right level, explain a step again without impatience, and give feedback at midnight when a human teacher is asleep. For learners whose English is weaker than their reasoning, a patient explanation in simpler language can be the difference between engagement and quiet withdrawal. Teachers who use such systems well report that they spend less time marking routine exercises and more time with the students who genuinely need them.

The dangers are equally concrete. Understanding is built by struggling with a problem, and a tool that removes the struggle can remove the learning with it. A student who reads a generated essay may recognise every sentence yet be unable to reconstruct the argument a week later, an illusion of competence that examinations expose late and painfully. Systems trained largely on English-language material handle Malaysian history, local literature and Bahasa Melayu unevenly, and they state wrong answers with the same confidence as right ones. Access is uneven too, since the better tools sit behind subscriptions and reliable broadband, so a technology promoted as an equaliser may quietly widen the gap between a well-connected urban school and a rural one.

What follows is not a verdict but a set of design choices. Assessment can shift towards work that is done and defended in the room: oral explanation, supervised writing, projects where a student must justify each decision aloud. Teachers need training in when to reach for the machine and when to withhold it, which is a professional judgement rather than a technical skill. Students, for their part, should be taught to interrogate output instead of accepting it, checking a claim against a textbook before it reaches an answer sheet. The tool will not decide whether classrooms improve. The people arranging the lesson around it will.

Passage 4 - The Machine in the Classroom: AI and Learning

Comprehension Questions

1. According to paragraph 1, why did schools move away from bans and detection software?

A. Teachers were unwilling to enforce the rules
B. The software was too expensive to renew
C. Students complained to education authorities
D. Detection proved unreliable and bans could not be enforced outside school

2. The word 'adaptive' in paragraph 2 most nearly means

A. working without electricity
B. able to adjust itself to suit the learner
C. designed only for advanced students
D. controlled entirely by the teacher

3. What does the writer mean by 'an illusion of competence' in paragraph 3?

A. A belief that machines are more intelligent than teachers
B. A false claim made by software companies about their products
C. A student's mistaken feeling of understanding produced by reading generated work
D. A teacher's overestimate of how much a class has covered

4. Which of the following is NOT given as a drawback of these tools?

A. They make marking routine exercises take longer for teachers
B. They handle Malaysian history and Bahasa Melayu unevenly
C. They state wrong answers as confidently as right ones
D. Better versions require subscriptions and reliable broadband

5. It can be inferred from paragraph 4 that assessment is changing because

A. written examinations have been abolished in most schools
B. teachers dislike marking long essays
C. work produced away from supervision can no longer prove a student's own understanding
D. oral tests are cheaper to administer than written ones

6. The main purpose of the passage is to

A. warn schools to ban artificial intelligence entirely
B. describe the technical workings of generative systems
C. promote a particular educational software product
D. argue that the value of these tools depends on how teaching is designed around them

Academic Word Bank

WORD	MEANING	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
prohibition	an official rule that forbids something	The prohibition on phones in the hall was announced at assembly.
unenforceable	impossible to make people obey	A curfew nobody can check is simply unenforceable.
withdrawal	the act of pulling back from taking part in something	His quiet withdrawal from group work worried the teacher.
equaliser	something that makes people more equal in chances or position	Free public libraries were once the great equaliser in poor districts.
interrogate	to question something closely to test whether it is true	Good researchers interrogate every figure before quoting it.

Reading — Answer Key with Reasons

Passage 1

Q	ANS	WHY THIS IS THE ANSWER
1	A	The closing paragraph states that flood mitigation depends on three things working together: adequate infrastructure, enforced development rules, and residents who understand the problem.
2	C	Paragraph 1 says permeable ground has been steadily replaced by roads, car parks and roofs, so rain that once soaked into soil now arrives at the drains within minutes.
3	B	Paragraph 2 explains that accelerating water downstream relocates the burden onto districts on the lower reaches, so 'displacing' means shifting the problem elsewhere.
4	D	Paragraph 3 lists retention ponds, restored wetlands, bioswales, permeable pavements and rooftop gardens; household underground tanks are never mentioned.
5	A	The passage notes that a few schemes now treat a pond as an amenity 'rather than an obstacle to profitable land use', implying the usual view was that it wasted saleable land.
6	C	The final sentences admit cities cannot be made rainproof yet argue they can be made resilient enough that heavy rain is only an inconvenience.

Passage 2

Q	ANS	WHY THIS IS THE ANSWER
1	B	Paragraph 1 says the work begins the day the application is approved, requires no interview, and can be switched on between lectures.
2	D	Paragraph 2 says workers have limited recourse when an account is suspended after a complaint, meaning limited means of appealing or obtaining a remedy.
3	A	Paragraph 3 states the benefits accrue unevenly, since skilled online work rewards existing ability while delivery work offers the least transferable experience.
4	C	Paragraph 2 lists fuel, phone data and vehicle repairs as deductions; no platform charge for tuition is mentioned anywhere.
5	D	Paragraph 4 praises universities offering fixed-hour campus roles and emergency grants that reduce the pressure to ride during examination weeks.
6	B	The passage sets flexibility and skill gains against unpaid waiting, missing protections and academic risk, closing with measured advice rather than a one-sided verdict.

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