READING PASSAGE 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on ***Questions 1-13***, which are based on Reading Passage 1 on pages 2 and 3.

Socotra Island

Situated in the Arabian Sea off the Arabian Peninsula is the Socotra archipelago, a remnant of an ancient landmass that became separated from Africa and Arabia 18 million years ago.

When scientists began the first substantial exploration of the islands 30 years ago, they found a fascinating collection of unusual plants and animals - a unique combination of 'relict' populations (organisms that have become extinct elsewhere) and species that have evolved to cope with the island's harsh conditions. In fact, almost a third of its plant species and up to 80 percent of its terrestrial animals are found nowhere else.

Life in the arid conditions is harsh for the people living there too. Isolated from the mainland by hundreds of kilometres, and with monsoons that rage for several months every year, the islanders were historically self-sufficient - relying only on what they themselves could produce to survive. There are floods and droughts, and many islanders lack adequate water resources and nutrition. Medical care and education are limited.

However, the main island, Socotra, is experiencing significant change. A rapid development programme has been instituted that will have far-reaching impacts on the island's people and the environment for decades to come. In the past, the only way to get to Socotra was by travelling for several days on a boat, but irregular flights began touching down on dirt landing strips during the late 1960s. By 1999, a runway had been constructed on Socotra that was capable of taking larger aircraft all year round, and since 2000 the capital, Hadibo, has seen huge expansion. New schools have been built, and a modern terminal was added to the airport, through which an increasing number of tourists are beginning to pass. And there are plans to construct new harbour facilities that will enable fishermen to sell their catch more easily, and also make it simpler for local people to have food, and bricks and timber for construction projects brought to the island.

However, although these improvements are significant, it’s the continuing development of Socotra’s road system that is having the greatest impact on the islanders. Until 1991, a few dirt tracks, navigable only by four-wheel drive, gave access to part of the island. Otherwise it was only possible to reach most areas on foot, or with a donkey. By 2001, however, there was an extensive network of unpaved car tracks, and the following year a tarmac road, the first of its kind on Socotra, connecting the airport to Hadibo, was completed. Now, a road traverses the Diksam plateau and continues on to the south coast, making essential services more accessible to a large number of villagers.

There is no doubt that the development of Socotra’s infrastructure has brought many benefits to the island’s inhabitants, but there is growing concern that the speed with which it is taking place is so rapid that it will be difficult for local people to maintain certain traditions. There is also the fear that the developments will threaten the island’s unique ecosystems. Building new roads and harbours may lead to the introduction of alien species to Socotra Island (as has already happened with the Indian house crow), damage to the sea’s biodiversity through the increased collection and sale of coral, and tourist developments on an inappropriate and unsustainable scale.

Problems were also caused by increasing access to sensitive areas. For example, cutting the road along the coast caused considerable damage to the stunning scenery. However, some steps were then taken to limit the damage caused by further development. For example, biodiversity project officers were consulted in the planning stages of the road that crosses the centre of Socotra, so it avoids some of the most scenic areas and sites that contain plants only found in a limited number of locations. It is an area which is also home to the greatest concentrations of dragon's blood trees and supports many endemic animals.

An agreement has now been reached about all future construction of roads. To protect the island’s ecologically sensitive areas, any proposed road will be subject to a report assessing its environmental impact prior to construction. The challenge has been to bring the benefits of development to Socotra without damaging the environment, which supports the people’s way of life and will form the basis of future development on the island.

Questions 1-5

Do the following statements agree with the information given in Reading Passage 1?

In boxes 1-5 on your answer sheet, write:

TRUE	*if the statement agrees with the information*
FALSE	*if the statement contradicts the information*
NOT GIVEN	*if there is no information on this*

1. Scientists found species on the islands that had died out in other countries.
2. The inhabitants used to be dependent on the mainland.
3. The fact that the first flights to the island were infrequent was because of poor weather conditions.
4. Most visitors to the islands stay in the capital city.
5. People's lives have been changed more by the airport than any other development.

Questions 6-13

Choose ***ONE WORD AND/OR A NUMBER*** from the passage for each answer.

Transportation

- At one time, it was only possible to reach Socotra by **6**……..
- In **7**…….. the airport runway was finished.
- The airport was further expanded with an up-to-date **8**……..
- Harbour improvements have made it easier to import **9**…….. and building materials.
- Before the new road system, parts of Socotra were only accessible on foot, by **10**…….. or in a four-wheel drive.

Impact on local people and the environment

- Fewer **11**……..will be continued by local inhabitants because of the speed of development.
- Removal of coral may damage the marine habitat.
- Biodiversity officers ensured the new road did not pass through places with rare **12**……..
- In future, environmental damage by road construction will be evaluated in a **13**……..