

The Daily Star WEEKEND MAGAZINE

REMINISCENCE

OF TREES AND MEN

Bangladesh is poor in many things. Perhaps almost in everything excepting the size and density of its population and the frequency of both their births and deaths. There is a great shortage here of universally accepted observations and opinions. The one glorious exception to that is that sun rises in the east (an observation) and that it should better continue to do so (an opinion). Every other thing, from the national anthem or even from the justification of there being a state such as ours to whether Lalou was a Muslim or a Hindu to what is blue and what green — not many tend to agree on one answer. Perhaps this is a sign of life — perhaps this is a sign of everything simply coming unstuck society and values, beauty and truth and goodness.

In such a situation it was undoubtedly a milestone of sensibility that over the years the society came to agree, very slowly indeed, that trees should not be felled at will, or even hurt and that we should rather let them live, what should then come as only a corollary to that, under the force circumstances, came in strongly from behind as the best and most agreed proposition in Bangladesh — more pronouncedly than the obviousness of such as we should produce more — agriculturally and industrially — and less in human head terms. The best agreement on the most urgently needed thing — that we should a lot more trees.

Whenever there is anywhere the talk of massive afforestation, society forestry, preventing desertification and soil erosion and degeneration of soil etc. I cannot but recall two dear names — one famous and perhaps a little notorious, and the other a rather unknown but truly outside man of courage, imagination, unflagging energy and unflinching feeling for the society and the fellow beings.

Jadu Miah was almost an institution by himself long before he became President Ziaur Rahman's strangely unmanageable guru-cum-pet by even a stranger designation senior minister. When I met him in his Alamnagar, Rangpur residence in 1950 — he was the handsome of men — and that can include women too — that my collegiate eyes have ever lovingly dwelt on. And he was a little too charming specially to us juniors in the bargain. But no one failed to perceive a kind of dangerousness lurking somehow somewhere behind that beguilingly beautiful mien and manners. He was, so we hear, ruthless. And we believed — without needing to ever have a proof of that. He could be in his early thirties then and was already a vice-chairman of the Rangpur municipality.

We belonged to a little circle which took a lot of fancy on him — and secretly amongst us used to call him Dasayn Mohan, the Robin Hoodesque character fashioned by Shashadhar Dutta of the 'Shesh Uttar' fame (that darling of a movie featuring Pramadathes Barua and Kanan Devi — both in their height of historic prowess — and also such songs as 'Toofan Mail' and 'Jodi Aponar Money Madhuri Mishaye', all composed by Kamal Dasgupta. In the Hindi version of this New Theatres hit — Barua sang, which was very rare of him, unforgettably 'Door Deshka Rehnewallah aya Desh-Paray', joined in by Kanan Devi — but all this is too long for even a Mahabharat — style digression). We were as such duly intrigued when the newborn boy child in the family was named Swapan — exactly as it was in the case of Mohan of the enthralling thrillers.

We got very close to the family and were regularly moved by the true humanity and humility of the elder Chhabi Bhabhi and charmed and touched by the beauty and simplicity of the junior Shanti Bhabhi — Jadu Bhai's two wives. I spent one of the best months of my life in the ancestral homes of both Jadu Bhai and Shanti Bhabhi in Domar thana in the then Nilphamari subdivision.

When some twenty-five years after that he was named a senior minister by Ziaur Rahman, some of us took his acceptance of it as an act of condescension. I personally felt rather hurt — as he was stooping too low as his mentor

Huseyn Shaheed Suharawardy had done a decade and a half before by becoming a minister in the cabinet of Bogra Mohammad Ali — the university freshman Suharawardy made into a man back in 1946 by appointing Ali as his finance minister.

Jadu Bhai — or Mashhur Rahman to the wider world — was for many years a Muslim League hardliner. Then one day he switched over to the Bhashani brand of left politics. Ziaur Rahman — fresh from the barracks, or truer still he was still in the barracks — needed as many political cushions as he could fish out from the lot of the greedy ones — specially of the left variety. That Jadu Bhai would be hooked was beyond our imagination — we who had in the meantime been distanced from him by the strange turns and twists of left politics. But by then we had become inured to such weird ideas as 'using' people for ideological ends — Toaha using a

Waheedul Haque

many of which were not foreseeable. And practically nothing came of it. I wanted to recall one of Jadu Bhai's fondest dreams to underline the fact that the railway tracks continue to cry to this day for eye-soothing and environment-cleansing avenues of trees on their bare and barren sides except for the Rajendrapur-Sreepur stretch.

This is perhaps not the wrong place to recall two earlier events that helped the greening of Dhaka rather than depleting its famous green cover an act that was one of the most painful memories of the regime Jadu Mian agreed to serve. First is Mr. Jabbar's creation of the garden now called the Ramna Green. This engineer from Mymensingh was a man of both idea and action. He did at least five big things which, in his capacity of the chief of the works depart-

to agree to the fair demand for he was shortly going to gift the nation its first Constitution on which would guarantee a state keeping completely aloof from matters of religious connection. And in the early days of independence he had also to be particularly wary of being dubbed as soft on Hindus and India — a campaign to which effect had commenced much earlier than could ever be conceived.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman could not give the temple back — instead he gave the nation, and not a community, a spacious garden which, after the Calcutta Maidan, fabled as the Gorer Math, had been cut up into many pieces — is decidedly the biggest city park for all the Bengali speaking peoples of the world. So goes the story which many believe to be true. The lines of coconut and mahogany trees by the Ramna side of the Udyan grew as a part of the development of the Udyan itself.



It was undoubtedly a milestone of sensibility that over the years the society came to agree, very slowly indeed, that trees should not be felled at will, or even hurt, and that we should rather let them live.

Maulana, incidentally called Bhashani, to further the cause of socialism and quite a big strand of left politicians supporting Ayubian military dictatorship with the plea that they were only using Ayub to help him open a window on the world for an isolated Peking — as also to encourage him to challenge the supremacy of the Indo-Soviet axis in the subcontinent. Brilliant students of the other strand of lefties were going in for superior services on the plea that they were infiltrating the bastion of feudal capitalist military colonial power axis of Pakistan. Jadu Bhai had around him many bright young people bristling with such wonderful ideas of justifying every failure and mistake, every act of greed and career building and every piece of stratagem resorted to keep away from the mainstream politics of Bangladesh distinguished by a nationalist surge and to undermine the same in every possible way. Jadu Bhai could well have responded to the idea of 'using' Ziaur Rahman against an Awami-BKSL backlash spearheading on Indo-Soviet comeback to the Bangladesh scene. But I do not propose either to while the political history of those heroic and treacherous times or to pen a qasidah eulogising the many splendoured man that Mashhur Rahman was, I am remembering him only for a thing that he did quite unexpectedly of him.

Taking up the portfolio of Railways he introduced the first of the super-express transports now popular as intercity trains. And many were the improvements he effected in the carriages and their runnings and still many more were on his mind. Then he tried to put the Railways to a most unlikely use. This was giving a big hand, through the railways, to the massive afforestation this land needed so badly. The main idea was to raise forests of trees running along the railway tracks for the whole length of them. For this he also arranged for letting property alongside the tracks out for planting fruit trees by private individuals who would, enjoy the literal fruits of their service in return.

The wonderful idea of tree-lined rail tracks ran into a formidable array of snags,

ment, he needn't as well have done at all. His was the main thrust in building the Dhaka-Aricha Road, the Ramna Bagan, setting up the headquarters of the Engineering Institution for all Pakistan in Dhaka just him open a window on the world for an isolated Peking — as also to encourage him to challenge the supremacy of the Indo-Soviet axis in the subcontinent. Brilliant students of the other strand of lefties were going in for superior services on the plea that they were infiltrating the bastion of feudal capitalist military colonial power axis of Pakistan. Jadu Bhai had around him many bright young people bristling with such wonderful ideas of justifying every failure and mistake, every act of greed and career building and every piece of stratagem resorted to keep away from the mainstream politics of Bangladesh distinguished by a nationalist surge and to undermine the same in every possible way. Jadu Bhai could well have responded to the idea of 'using' Ziaur Rahman against an Awami-BKSL backlash spearheading on Indo-Soviet comeback to the Bangladesh scene. But I do not propose either to while the political history of those heroic and treacherous times or to pen a qasidah eulogising the many splendoured man that Mashhur Rahman was, I am remembering him only for a thing that he did quite unexpectedly of him.

Before the recent attack of bad maintenance and bad security — the Ramna Green, the venue of the Pahela Baishakh national celebration of the Bengali new year, served the Dhaka residents' needs for a green patch of fragrance and fresh air most satisfyingly. From 1956 till the trees of the Suharawardy Udyan grew to some eye-catching sight by say 1976 — the Ramna Bagan by the side of the Ramna serpentine — subsequently called lake — was the place to go for nature lovers, young people and newly weds. No doubt Mr. Jabbar was inspired to situate his garden there because of an earlier tradition of the serpentine, lined on one side by tammarind trees, big-canopy king-size raintrees and the now obliterated copse of big-leaf Segun trees, drawing from all over the city people looking for a spell of solitude in a spot of beauty.

The rise of the Suharawardy Udyan is inextricably linked with the greatest man of our new emerged state. It is widely believed to be an outcome of one of his many expressions of presence of mind and a penchant for decisions arrived at a most impromptu fashion. The marauding Pakistani army, in their mad plan to prove that they were, through committing the carnage and the genocide of '71, only making East Pakistan safe for Islam from the inroads of Hindu influence come from across the borders — has razed the centuries-old Ramna Kalibari to the ground. There was no sign left of that big temple complex when the freedom fighters took the city and the Pakistanis surrendered. This was a shock for the nine million refugees freshly come back to their homeland and many naturally organised an appeal to the great man for the complex to be rebuilt. There was no way for the great leader

It is time to turn to our other hero — an almost unknown man. His link with the efforts of greening the country was much too fortuitous. And as such it needs to be told in some detail so as to make it credible. Can we, before embarking on that lengthy job, give a moment or two to other men who served green life and nature and endeavoured to realise their dreams. Two of them live till today and may they live up to be centenarians. One of them is Santosh Babu of Sherpur, Jamalpur. God knows why and how he was inspired to raise a garden of such wonderful collection and beauty tucked in a corner of the most vulgarly prosaic part of that otherwise nice little island housing 'dachas' and villas — or palaces, if you will — of Cornwallis's grand children or

of Tanjung Jamboeye on Sumatra's northern tip. A US marine archaeologist, Robert Marx, confirmed the discovery. Italian diamond dealer Bruno de Vincenty, who is involved in the search, says the ship carried 400 tonnes of cargo — jewels, gold bars, crowns, statues — worth nine billion dollars, making it the world's richest undersea treasure. But Jayatama has put the value at one billion dollars.

The company is negotiating with the London-based Christie's auction house to sell the treasures to pay salvage costs estimated at US\$50 to US\$100 million.

A treasure hunt for the wreckage of a Jewel-laden Portuguese galleon in the Straits of Malacca has got bogged down in a controversy. Abdul Razak of IPS reports.

the zaminders. Nothing can perhaps be as dead and forbidding as a cluster of rice mills with their concrete-laid flats broken by ungainly chimneys. Santosh Babu is himself a rice miller — but one always finds him in a small construction at the far corner of his mill but facing his garden — the light of his eyes. But he is a sad man too. Every night there is stealing of the more precious plants — many of the nocturnal visitors coming from the direction of the cantonment. But he complains most about the vandalising raids by college girls — coming in droves to fall upon his copse of Chinese guava trees. But the complaining is done with a glint of delight and pleasure in his eyes. I didn't find what I have been looking for over decades — the creeper Malati and the trees Pinal and Parul. But Chameli was there which I have failed to meet in my crisscrossing sojourns of our dear land. Santosh Babu has an interest for growing exotic things — and together with cardamom and cinnamon and clove; wonder of wonders, there were raspberries fruiting in this tropical humid cranny of an island. Much like the padre who has been growing for long I hear, avocados in his churchyard in Madhupur, Tangail.

Santosh is no doubt carrying on in the Tradition of Iswar Guha, the arboricultural wizard who flourished in nearby Jamalpur town in the earlier parts of this country. His chetana (mind the name, O reader) Nursery was known and envied all over undivided India and his pioneering work in hybridizing evergreen species of improved fruits and flowers were recognised throughout the world. The muktear — or second class lawyer by profession also wrote an encyclopedia of arboriculture-horticulture in 27 volumes which, due to factors beyond his control, couldn't be published. All that remains of Iswar Guha's works is the big round kilogram weighing brinjal that is grown to this day all over the region from Gaffargaon to the Bahadurabad Ghat. All that remains of the chetana Nursery is a lone — very lovely indeed — Garjan tree standing on the entry point of the Jamalpur town.

For from Sherpur-Jamalpur there is a small family garden that once had a very good — shall we not say great? collection of Jawba — hibiscus rosa sinensis — a little over a hundred varieties. This cute little thing — known as Hiru Bhai's Bagan — tucked away in Char Kamalapur on the River Kumar — at outskirts of the small and beautifully kept Faridpur municipality which has been aptly called rather as 'a street in search of a town' — has many delightful plants brought from all over the subcontinent by Hiru Bhai — who would perfectly fit John Galsworthy's little man.

Sufia Kamal : A Tribute

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

LATELY, whenever I have had an occasion to see her, the scene was invariably a concourse of men, a meeting within the confines of a hall, or in the open under a canopy, and the fair and frail lady, quite small and shrunken with her years, talking to admirers, obliging the autograph-hungry youngsters, responding to greetings, being led to her appointed seat on the dais, tenderly supported by younger hands, so unsteady her steps these days. And on all these occasions, I have seen her as a flickering flame which any vagrant whiff of wind could snuff out any moment. Sufia Kamal, on her eightieth birthday, is exactly that, a flickering

picture of Sufia Kamal in her veils, or in her 'burkha'. If she ever had to wear one, she must have come out of it soon enough. Today, she has her sari-end drawn over her head, half covering it, and it just adds that touch of dignity and

sought by all who in this country constitute the forces for peace, progress, emancipation of women and democracy. And her name always comes first in a list of promoters or protestors, as the case may be. On numerous occasions, we



Sufia Kamal turns 80, while she is still active.

From a poet to a public figure, that is how one sees the transformation of this lady, now in her eightieth year.

flame, but a flame that has defied not only vagrant winds but tempests, too, and that continues to emit a steady light.

Sufia Kamal (1911-) is still lovingly, almost nostalgically, mentioned as a poet, though her poetic days are long past. Most of us were not born, and many of us were but toddlers when she appeared on the literary scene, befriended and heralded by Nazrul Islam, among others. She wrote romantic verses, and the theme of love, love found and lost, had a genuine, personal ring in her poetry. The metre was flawless, and the diction chaste. Both in her personal situation and in the moving poignancy of her verse, she easily recalled another poetess of an earlier generation, Kamini Roy of *Alo O Chhaya*. She took her readers by surprise, for she appeared almost from nowhere, a young female from a feudal Muslim family that zealously guarded its women folk from the world outside and kept them away from institutional education. Some Arabic and Persian and Urdu with an indifferent dose of Bengali perhaps, — yes that was about all. Sufia Kamal has herself told us the story of how she was brought up in the isolation of that country seat of the family in Barisal. It sounds so far off now when the corridors of our colleges and universities are loud with female footsteps.

From Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain to Sufia Kamal, however, there was some advance in the social status of Muslim women. Begum Rokeya was a lady in her veils, and when she spoke to men, she did so from behind a screen. That was the dictate of purdah, as it was understood those days. I do not remember to have seen any

grace which informs her whole personality. There is nothing markedly patrician about her figure, though, unless we discern its trace in her carriage, her demeanour. Over the years, she has kept and confirmed her place as a poet. She has not led any literary movement, nor can it be said that her poetry has kept pace with the movement of times. But this much it certainly can be claimed that her poetic voice has been consistently authentic, in perfect harmony with the integrity of her personality. The two together have put her in a place, in the estimation of her countrymen, where she is second to none.

From a poet to a public figure, that is how one sees the transformation of this lady, now in her eightieth year. But one must be careful as one uses that expression, — public figure. Sufia Kamal is not in politics, in the ordinary sense of the word. She is with the people. But on occasions, she has been in the thick of politics, only politics in its broad, non-partisan aspect. Increasingly over the past two decades and more, she has been in the front-line of democratic movements. She has provided unique leadership in all movements in the cause of women, and in the cause of peace and disarmament. Her support is eagerly

have seen her leading a protest march in the streets of Dhaka. Her unflinching courage in all our dark days, her unflinching voice, low but firm, have always been a source of inspiration for her people.

The nation owes her a deep debt of gratitude, for what she has been all these years, for what she has meant to a people still struggling for light, for emancipation, for a life of freedom and dignity.

The nation salutes this high-spirited and high-minded lady, Begum Sufia Kamal, on her eightieth birthday. May she live a hundred years, in the fullest enjoyment of health and happiness.

An eminent educationist and poet, the author is a former Vice Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University and former Advisor to the erstwhile caretaker government.

NOTICE

In order to accommodate a number of topical features in today's magazine section, we have held over the regular column 'My World' for this week. Editor, Magazine Section

Treasure Hunt in Dire Straits

JAKARTA — The hunt for the wreckage of the Portuguese galleon 'Flor de la Mar' (Flower of the Sea), which sank in the Straits of Malacca in the 16th century, has set off a row involving ministers, lawyers, historians and businessmen in Indonesia.

The recovery of the sunken ship's treasures, said to be worth billions of dollars, could also involve Indonesia in a dispute with neighbouring Malaysia which has also staked a claim.

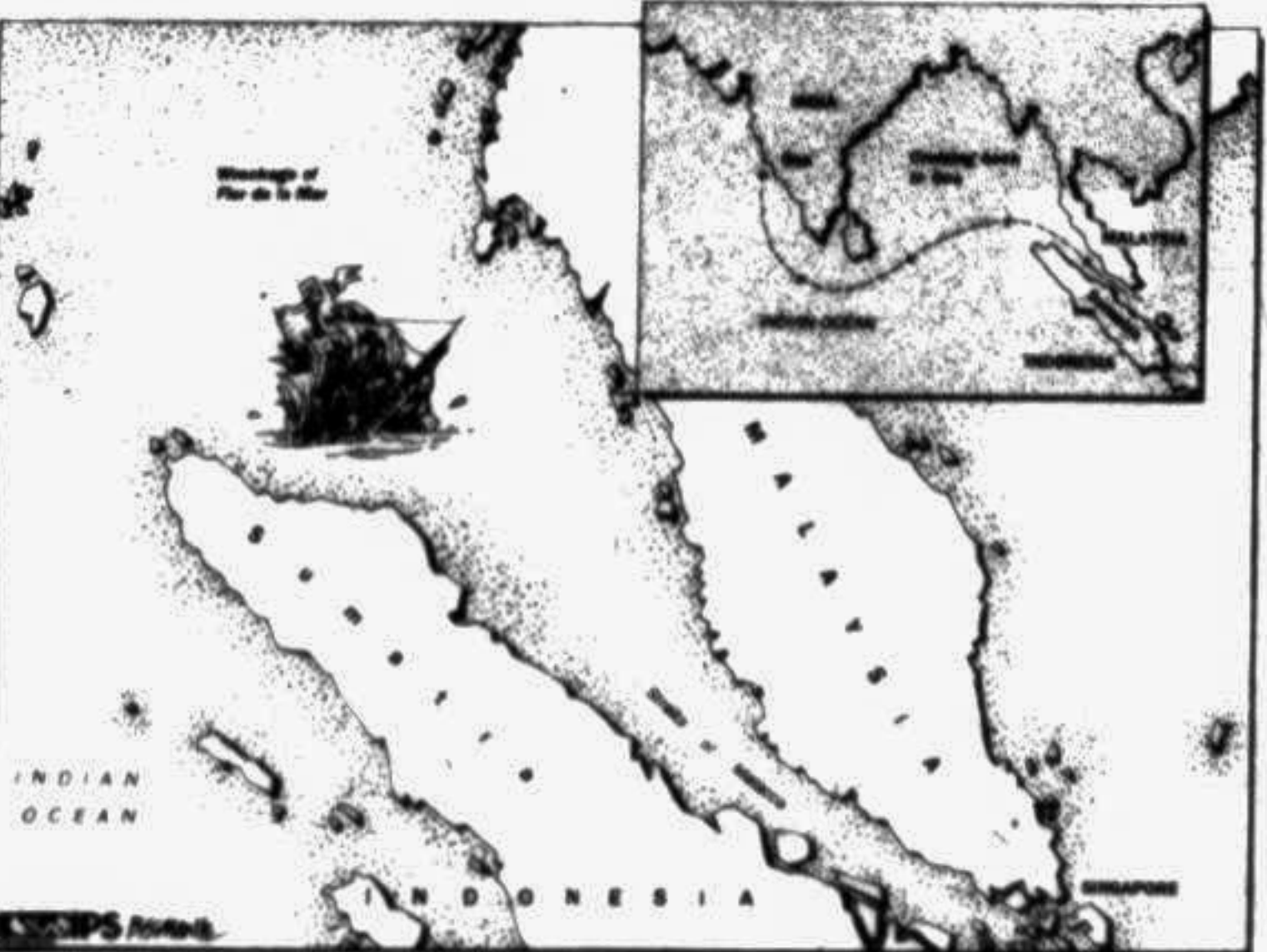
"The scramble for the undersea treasure has now become a political issue needing political solutions," said A. B. Lapijan, historian and researcher at Indonesia's Institute of Science (LIPI).

Archaeologists insist that no historical heritage recovered from Indonesian seas should be sold as objects of trade. Lawyers maintain the hunt must stop until after the government is ready to deal with the legal consequences.

of Tanjung Jamboeye on Sumatra's northern tip. A US marine archaeologist, Robert Marx, confirmed the discovery.

The company is negotiating with the London-based Christie's auction house to sell the treasures to pay salvage costs estimated at US\$50 to US\$100 million.

A treasure hunt for the wreckage of a Jewel-laden Portuguese galleon in the Straits of Malacca has got bogged down in a controversy. Abdul Razak of IPS reports.



The Flor de la Mar, skippered by Admiral Alfonso d'Albuquerque, sank in the Straits of Malacca in 1511, with treasures plundered from the palace of the Sultan of Malacca, on Malaysia's southwestern coast.

The galleon was cruising home to its base in Goa, a Portuguese enclave in India, when it hit reefs and sank off the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Malaysia claims rights to the Flor de la Mar's treasure and is seeking Indonesia's help in having them returned to Malacca.

The waters of the Straits of Malacca between Indonesia and Malaysia, particularly the narrow sea-lanes near the Indonesian coast, are believed to contain wrecks of numerous ships that sank during the 15th and 16th centuries.

The Indonesian government has licensed 10 firms, each of which has to pay 100 million rupiah (US\$52,000) deposit, to recover undersea treasures and war loot hidden by Japanese occupation forces during World War II.

Over 300 shipwrecks, including those of World War II, are still entombed in Indonesian waters, especially along the so-called 'Silk and Spice' routes linking the ports of

what was then called the East Indies where Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish ships cruised for trade and colonies.

Jakarta banned unauthorised treasure hunting in 1986 after it lost out on a treasure trove of ceramic ware and gold bars recovered from a Dutch shipwreck in the waters of the Riau Archipelago near Singapore.

The goods were auctioned by Christie's in Amsterdam. The Netherlands, claiming to be the legal successor of the East India Company which owned the ship, took 100 per cent of the US\$15.3 million proceeds.

Retired Indonesian Admiral Sudomo who heads a committee that oversees salvage operations says Indonesia will return any treasure found on the Flor de la Mar to Malaysia.

But historians like Lapijan say Malaysia cannot claim sole ownership because the history of the Malacca Sultanate was closely linked with Indonesia.

When the Portuguese invaded Malacca in 1511, the Sultan escaped and continued to rule from Riau in Indonesia and Johore in Malaysia.

"It does not matter who finally gets the treasure so long as the world heritage is protected and preserved," said Lapijan.