

A Tribute to Suu Kyi

A light shining, sometimes a little flickeringly, in a dark corner of Asia has won the most important international recognition as a symbol of hope for a people living under subjugation for decades.

The citation of the award puts into focus not only the role played by Ms Suu Kyi, a housewife-turned-rebel leader but also the tragedy of Burma, with all the blatant betrayals committed by the junta.

If the junta in Rangoon shuts its eyes to the political realities in Burma, it also remains seemingly oblivious of the changes in the world since it refused to accept the poll verdict over a year ago.

Since the rulers in Rangoon remain apparently indifferent to these changing realities, it is for Burma's Asian neighbours, especially of the ASEAN grouping, to tell the junta that it must give in and accept the last year's election verdict without any delay or any equivocation.

In this context, Bangladesh may well have a role to play on the side of the freedom-loving people of Burma. Having successfully brought to an end the eight-year authoritarian rule and established a multi-party democratic system, we should use our position in different international organisations in support of the legitimate political rights of people in one of our closest neighbours.

Where is Our Winter ?

End of Ashwin is supposed to be the time when winter arrives in Bangladesh (or whatever passes for winter). It is an eagerly-awaited season, not only because it gives us the chance, albeit short-lived, to put on our blazers and suits, but also because it rescues us from the stifling humidity of preceding months (not to mention the rain, muddy roads and puddles of dirty water collecting in cracks and potholes of every description).

Today is Ashwin 30, and our patience is wearing pretty thin. The rain has fallen virtually non-stop since it started sometime back in March, with gaps filled up by periods of excruciating heat and humidity (a real case of being out of the frying pan and into the fire). So, where is our winter? Where is it?

We need the winter not only for strolling about on the great white beaches of Cox's Bazar, but also to inflict serious bodily harm on the nation's Public Enemy No. 1 — mice. In fact, if we don't manage to get rid of enough mice in time, then our precious tailored suits which stay unused (or unusable) for eight or nine months of the year, may end up acting as mere teeth sharpeners for the deadly rodents.

But where is the winter anyway? There is a strong cold with about, but that is more a result of all these lows being formed over the Bay of Bengal with monotonous regularity than breeze from Siberia. What we really want to see is mist! Yes, misty evenings, foggy nights and a sweater and scarf on a sunny afternoon — that sort of winter. No rain, no sticky wet cold wind, just crisp coolness pierced by brilliant sunshine.

But most important of all, we need the winter pretty quickly so that the Dhaka City Corporation will no longer have any excuse for not repairing city roads which are giving the city a truly battle-scarred look. And the street lights! They too are not getting fixed, so we are told, because the rain keeps falling, postponing the winter.

There is something terribly sinister about this late arrival of our best-loved season. Something to do with man's tampering with the ecology's natural balance, experts say. Summers are getting longer and hotter, monsoons more erratic, floods and cyclones more frequent. It is a most worrying prospect indeed. It really is time our environmental experts—we do have them, don't we?—informed the public about what sort of weather we can expect to have in the next 50 to 100 years.

EVERY day millions of people depend on trees and forests to help them meet their basic needs for food, fuelwood and fodder. In rural areas of the developing world, these resources provide a crucial source of employment and income. They also help improve agricultural production and protect the environment.

Poverty and hunger continue to cause suffering and death. It is estimated that some 500 million people are malnourished worldwide and that 15 million people die each year from malnutrition and related diseases. With the world population now just over 5,000 million — and expected to rise to 8,500 million by 2,025 — feeding the world must be recognized as the leading priority of the global community.

Trees for food: Food from trees — either harvested commercially or collected from forests and natural groves — is consumed everywhere. Reliance on forest foods is greatest in developing countries. In the wooded areas of Thailand for example, 60 per cent of all food comes directly from the forests.

Forest foods include leaves, fruit, seeds and nuts, roots and tubers, saps and gums, mushrooms and bushmeat.

TREES FOR LIFE

Forests for Food Security and Environmental Protection

Since the beginning of history, trees have played an essential role in human life: food, shade, shelter, fuel, transport, medicine, and worship. Today, trees provide a livelihood for millions.

The theme for World Food Day 1991 (today) is "Trees for Life" to remind us of their value both as providers of food and income and as protectors of the environment.

These are cultivated around the world in production systems ranging from small home gardens — with a few fruit trees — to large commercial orchards and plantations. In 1989, some 336 million tonnes of fruit were produced worldwide.

Income: Forest resources (both timber and non-wood products) support hundreds of thousands of large- and small-scale industries around the world, creating employment for millions of people. Many developing countries have great potential for expanding wood-based industries and FAO is promoting their sustainable management to provide the long-lasting benefits.

In rural areas of the developing world, small-scale, forest-based industries are crucial sources of income, especially for the landless, who may depend on free access to the forests.

Trees have long been valuable commercial crops. In the Mediterranean region, products from olive trees have been traded for thousands of years, and continue to bolster the local economies in certain regions of Italy and Spain.

Fuelwood: Fuelwood is a major source of energy in the developing world, providing more than 90 per cent of all energy in some countries.

Some 2,000 million people depend on wood and charcoal for cooking and preserving their food. But in 1980, nearly 1,300 million could not meet their fuelwood needs — almost 3,000 million could be facing shortages by the end of the decade.

Existing fuelwood supplies require careful management — through conservation programmes and well-organized

marketing. Rural households and industries consume fuelwood by using fuel-efficient stoves. The introduction of the Chorkor stove in Ghana, for instance, reduced wood consumption for smoking fish by 50 per cent.

Fodder: There are 30 to 40 million pastoralists worldwide, herding some 400 million cattle, goats and sheep. Trees help protect their grazing lands and

ents drawn from deeper in the soil for use at the surface. Some trees act as natural fertilizers, absorbing nitrogen from the atmosphere and "fixing" it in the soil through root and leaf detritus. Certain crops — and all livestock — benefit from the shade that trees provide.

People's participation: FAO defines sustainable development as "the management and conservation of the natural resource base and the orientation of technological and institutional change in such a manner as to ensure the attainment and continued satisfaction of human needs for present and future generations."

The realization of this goal requires the active participation of governments and people at all stages of planning and implementing development programmes.

Medicine: The medicinal uses of trees and plants have been recognized for thousands of years. In India and China, for example, records of their use date back to 5,000 years ago. Today, the majority of the world's population still depends on natural medicines. In developing countries, natural products are the only source of medicine for 75-90 per cent of the population.

Trees are a rich source of modern pharmaceuticals. The active ingredients in 25 per cent of prescription drugs come from medicinal plants which also are used as chemical models for the synthesis of many more.

Trees for biodiversity: They are an estimated ten million species on earth. The potential value of many of these species — as sources of food, medicine and industrial raw material — is unknown. Maintaining biodiversity is important for agriculture. Cross-breeding domestic crops with wild varieties can improve yields and produce new strains better adapted to growing conditions or more resistant to disease and pests. Where selective planting to promote high-yielding varieties has reduced the gene pool, a disease or pest that affects one or more staple crop varieties could have a devastating impact on world food security. Diversity reduces the risks.

Trees and climate: Each and every tree has some impact on climate, even if merely by providing shade or acting as a windbreak. At a broader level, trees influence regional climate patterns: approximately half the rainfall in the Amazon basin, for example, is derived from local evapo-transpiration.

Trees play an important role in the carbon cycle by absorbing and storing CO<sub>2</sub> — one of the main greenhouse gases contributing to global warming. Terrestrial ecosystems store approximately three times as much carbon as is held in the atmosphere.

Trees for the future: Nature's resources are the wealth on which society has been built. How we use or abuse that inheritance will determine what legacy we leave to future generations. New ideas are the first seeds of change. If we want to build a better future, we need to promote the conservation and sustainable development of existing resources, among them trees and forests. The dividends would go far beyond questions of hunger and poverty, they would enrich the quality of our lives and ensure food security and a better world for our children.

FAO Feature

Food for Afforestation Programme

by Mostafa Kamal Majumder

MY patch of forest is one year and four months old, said Bakaton (40) with a broad smile. She was nursing 'Mehagin', 'Australia mengium' and 'Ekasia' plants some of which have grown seven to ten feet in height.

Under the programme NGOs get afforestation schemes sanctioned according to WFP guidelines approved by the Ministry of Environment and Forests. NGOs motivate farmers to allow the use of their fallow land on a production-sharing basis, and select poor and destitute women from the neighbourhood to work as maintenance workers to raise and nurse trees.

On an adjacent plot another woman, Surja Banu (20) was working. Her plants are having a faster growth. Wife of a peasant and having a seven-year-old daughter she, like Bakaton, is raising 200 trees at Baraibari village under Kaliakair upazila of Gazipur district, about 50 kilometers north of Dhaka city.

Bakaton and Surja Banu are the beneficiaries of an afforestation programme launched by POUH, an NGO, with support from the World Food Programme (WFP). It aims at ensuring more productive use of food aid through diversification.

The long term objective of the programme is to facilitate faster growth in forestry. The short term objectives are: improvement of the environment, creation of additional forest resource base, generation of employment for the poor, and creation of a source of income from tree and other tree products.

Launched in 1988-89 through one NGO helping plant about ten thousand saplings as a pilot project, it

has gradually been expanded, and this year (1991-92) afforestation has been made a regular programme of WFP in Bangladesh.

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Saplings are supplied from nurseries established by NGOs with technical cooperation from local officials of the Forest Department who also offer advice on the best ways of planting and nursing different species of saplings.

A novelty of the food for afforestation programme of WFP is that the survival rate of saplings is close to 100 per cent, because maintenance workers keep watch on those as a full-time activity and plant a new sapling in place of a dead one. A maintenance worker is assured daily wage for three years.

In selecting beneficiaries (maintenance workers) of the programme NGOs give preference to pure landless, destitute, widowed and divorced women. About ninety per cent of the beneficiaries are women.

A total of 156 schemes launched under the programme are scattered from Teknaf and Harbang in Cox's

Bazar in the southern part of Bangladesh to Rangpur and Dinajpur regions in the north.

One good aspect of the programme is that instead of creating rich-poor frictions it is helping poor frictions. It is helping people belonging to the two classes to work together for common benefit. A owner who has under registered agreement allowed the use of the land for afforestation for 20 years is assured a share of half of the timber and fuel wood. So he is also keen to ensure that outsiders do not disturb maintenance workers.

At Baraibari, for instance, Shahara (50), a landlady, has asked two maintenance workers — Bakaton and Surja Banu — to erect thatched houses and live beside the patches of forest they are raising to keep a 24-hour watch on the trees.

The landlord of two other neighbouring plots warn people of the village to keep their goats and cattle away from a forest being raised by two destitute women — Hasna (30) and Anwara (40).

The four women maintenance workers said, before getting involved with the afforestation programme they used to do domestic work in others homes and could have food once or twice a day depending on the day's earning. Now their family members not only have three square meals a day but also better dress.

The maintenance workers grow vegetable and seasonal fruit plants beside the trees. Landlords are not entitled to any share of such products. NGO executives and WFP officials believe by the end of the third year of continued wage support, maintenance workers

would be able to be on their own, selling by-products and engaging themselves in other activities.

Amena (30) of 'Dhole Samudra' village in Kaliakair hopes she will be able to sell pumpkins in the ensuing season. Last season she sold Taka 200 worth of lady's finger besides meeting her family's consumption requirement.

Says POUH chief Dr Haroun-er-Rashid, the programme is not only helping to increase tree stock in a country having only about eight per cent forest cover, protect land from erosion and improve environment; but also to raise the economic and social status of the beneficiaries. Their demands are very limited. Even from this meagre income of five 'seer' of wheat a day they save. Bakaton, for instance, has in just 16 months bought one cow and two goats.

Gaston Eyben, Director of Operations, WFP in Bangladesh adds the programme is growing faster than we expected. The objective is to create regular income for the poor through more productive use of food aid, normally used for construction of roads excavation of canals and other infrastructure.

A key question, however, is — will maintenance workers continue with the same zeal when wage support will be withdrawn after three years? It is assumed that NGOs running the schemes will continue take interest as they will have a 20 per cent share of the timbers. Maintenance workers, it is believed, will be able to earn their living from forest by-products and will not leave because of the promise of handsome returns from the timber.

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Parabat Express

Sir, It was indeed a disgusting experience for me to have travelled from Sylhet to Dhaka on the 11th October. I was accompanied by a visitor from England, his wife, two daughters, son-in-law and grand child aged five and we all travelled in 1st class. In total disregard to the Juma timings the scheduled time of departure of the Express from Sylhet was 2 pm. I could not offer my Juma prayers and was quite upset about it. If the time of departure could be made to 2.30 pm on Fridays only, many could have offered their Juma prayers before boarding the train for Dhaka. Authorities could have been more thoughtful about the departure time on Fridays.

On this train, we did not find any dining car attached although there were pre-recorded announcements every half an hour. We did not get any food nor drink not even water till we reached Akhaura Junction after four and half hours at 6.30 pm. Thank Allah, there was a bottle with enough water for the toddler who was with us.

Charge of Communication in the present set up of our democratic and people's government, some action, I am sure, will be taken in this matter for improvement.

AMF Quadir Dhaka-1207

New World Order and UN

Sir, Our attention has been drawn to the article "Morality Development through UN Approach" by Dr Abu Obaidul Huque published in your daily on August 18. There is no denying the fact that moral degradation is a widespread phenomenon all over the world today, and it is really a serious threat to our social and universal order and peace. It is the root of all crimes in the society.

So, timely steps should be taken to curb this serious moral degradation may be through implementation of such proposals as the one by Mr Huque by the world body, UN. This is, of course, a universal noble cause for the greater interest and welfare of mankind. This issue may also be treated as one of the impor-

tant strategic for the new reform, that is, a "New World Order" conceived after the Gulf war and change in USSR.

We wholeheartedly believe that the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry will also come forward to mobilise such proposal with the United Nations.

Dr. M. Abdul Aziz Khan Former Vice-Chancellor Chittagong University.

Whither peace?

Sir, We the general mass, here in Bangladesh, do not see any hope to live peacefully. Millions of jobless people are hopelessly roaming from door to door to find any sort of work. While thousands of workers in various places are being made surplus. Traders and businessmen are being bound to pack with mournful minds. The day-worker has been crushed to the cruel walls of the poverty. Life of vehicles is coming down swiftly by running on the uncared roads. The wheels of education have been stopped. The hearth in the house is almost cold. Societies have gone broken.

On the other hand, only the politically positive and negative parties are found busy in fighting in the streets against each other. By their sides criminals are busy to make the life of the helpless people a hell. Hijackers are snatching belongings, gondas are looting shops, mastans are brandishing weapons in the localities. Traffic on the road has

become a mess.

Foreign investors are leaving our country bag and baggage. Development works are not progressing. What we are now getting are the hits from the natural disasters and miscreants. Exporting of jute and jute goods, fish, garments and electronic items have been made jeopardised. Jute growers are, even burning their costly produce. Sugar-mills are sitting idle as their unsold product is melting to drains. Food growers are facing increased price of fertilizer, and thousands of agricultural machines are being sold.

Suffering people are being trapped in the net of bribery. Manpower authorities and agents are cheating the poor nation by advertising false amount of service charge. Suffered job-seekers are being cheated by the false employers. Fake drug producers are killing innocent patients. In the name of humanitarian service doctors are diverting patients from hospitals to their private clinics.

In the flood-hit areas mothers and children are dying of no food and medicare.

If the descriptions are not unfacts, then who can dare to live peacefully in Bangladesh! But we wish all this to be made unfacts, and hope the administration would put its sincere efforts to make things right from right now.

F M Abdul Matin 11-C, 11-2-4 Mirpur, Dhaka.

OPINION

The Philosophy of Hartal

It is heartening to see (Star, Opinion, Oct. 3) an editor allowing some space for comments on the misuse of democratic rights by groups, political or otherwise, who give strike or hartal calls.

For the last two years I have been unsuccessfully trying to get one article published on the place of strikes in daily and national life. It is time to have a close look on the adverse implications of the local modus operandi employed by parties and their field workers.

The misguided leaders, in their zeal and enthusiasm for their causes, forget, or ignore some democratic norms. The members of the public, who are 'threatened' to 'support' their cause, fall into several categories, such as, (a) those who do not wish to support the cause; (b) those who wish to remain neutral; (c) the supporters, active or passive.

What is happening is that all are coerced, or threatened to observe the hartal. Intimidation and violence are employed, and public and private properties damaged, to make the hartal seem 'successful'.

If the other person disagrees with me, I cannot force him to toe my line of manifesto. Hartals are all right if the others' right to disagree is respected. It is not necessary

A Mawaz Dhaka