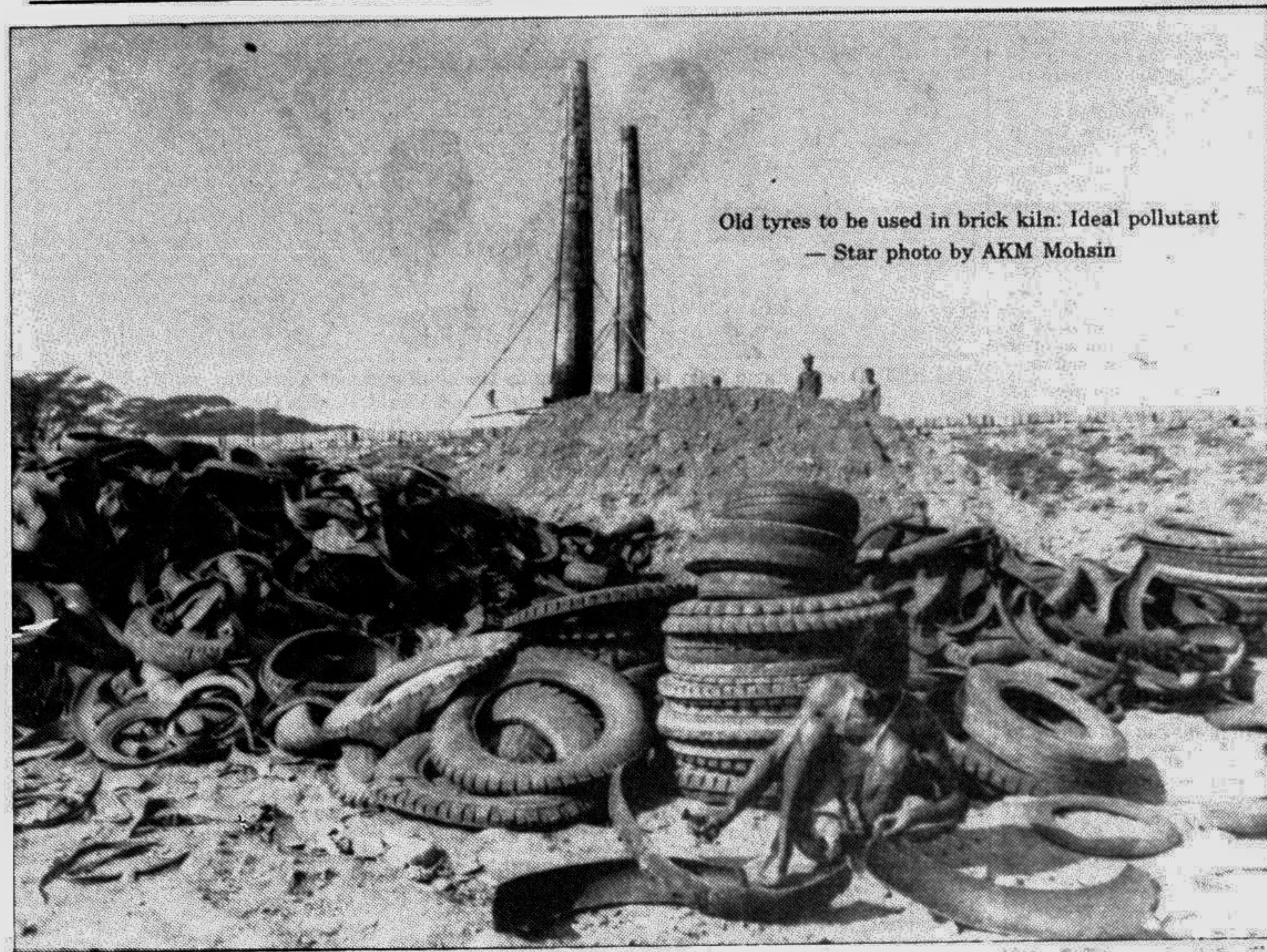


Brick Fields in City Periphery Adverse Impact on Dwellers

by A S M Nurunnabi

It is a sad aspect of our city planning that some of the brick fields using harmful materials for their kilns are allowed to operate with impunity near city areas without let or hindrance being placed on their damaging modes of operation.



Old tyres to be used in brick kiln: Ideal pollutant
— Star photo by AKM Mohsin

THE brick fields in areas adjacent to Dhaka city are one of the important environmental factors affecting the city life. With the fast pace of development following steady urbanisation with concomitant building activities in the city and its adjacent areas, the rising growth of brick fields within the periphery of the city and its outskirts is a normal phenomenon.

The city is already under seriously adverse environmental impacts on account of prevalence of the causative factors like industrial pollution, air pollution, noise pollution, etc. The addition of brick fields to the list of such incriminating factors in the sphere of the city's environment has been posing a growing threat of further deterioration in this respect.

Brick fields are already in existence in certain city areas and its outskirts. We find them on both sides of the river Buriganga, particularly near Pagla, at Mirpur, Mohammadpur and other vast areas extending beyond Gabtali. Some of these brick fields bring earth from far away areas for brick manu-

facturing. Other brick fields use earth from their existing sites. The fields from which earth is collected by digging subsequently become less suitable for agricultural purposes. Particularly, on the other side of the Buriganga river where land is low lying, if dug up for collection of earth, it results in further depression of the land level.

In the cases of the expanding number of brick fields on the river banks which resort to such practices, the future result would be large-scale uselessness of such depressed areas, making future plans for expansion of the Dhaka city towards the other side of the Buriganga river more difficult and costly. Already the materials from the existing brick fields find their way into the Buriganga river making its water highly polluted as an additional damaging agent in association with other chemical wastes from the adjoining tanneries and other harmful wastes from sewerage lines connecting the river water.

Next come the damaging effects that are created by the brick kilns operated by the brick

fields. Some of these brick kilns use gas and furnace oil where the fall-out of elements detrimental to environment, causes less adverse effects. But the majority of the kilns in Dhaka city areas use pieces of wood logs and bamboo stumps and also old tyres as fuels for the kilns. Their adverse effect on environment is more pronounced as the smoke pollution thus created spreads far and wide in the city and poses a potential threat to public health.

Another important factor deserving consideration is the extent of damage caused to our forest resources by the use of tree logs and bamboo stumps for operating the kilns. In a recent report, it was stated that brick fields in the northern districts were using bamboo stumps for their kilns on such a large scale that it created considerable depletion of the bamboo resources of those districts.

Thus it became a cause for serious concern with the relevant authorities. If this be the position in northern districts, there is every reason to believe that the brick fields within our city areas are not free from making similar inroads into our bam-

boo and forest resources. No indications are available as to the extent the existing laws being enforced to check the smoke pollution caused by the brick kilns and the on-going destruction of our forest and bamboo resources as a result of their use by such brick kilns.

It is a sad aspect of our city planning that some of the brick fields using such harmful materials for their kilns are allowed to operate with impunity near city areas without let or hindrance being placed on their damaging modes of operation both from the environmental and public health considerations. It is imperative that the Department of Environment should play an effective role in prohibiting brick fields to operate near city areas.

In this situation, the sooner the areas of operation of these brick fields are shifted outside the periphery of the city areas including the areas earmarked for inclusion in the planned expansion of the city through development of satellite townships in the near future, the better will be the prospects for a more organised civic life in our emerging mega city.

Soccer and Savagery

by Tunku Varadarajan

DAVID Beckham is in serious distress. His countrymen hate him. Worse still, his country's tabloids have begun to howl for his head in the frightening manner of the Fleet Street wolf pack.

Beckham is a member of the England soccer team, a sulky blond-streaked pinup boy who is paid about \$14 million a year by his club, more than any other player in Britain, and is engaged to Victoria Adams, better known as Posh Spice of the Spice Girls.

So why is Britain so distraught? Did he commit some terrible crime? Did he spit on the Union Jack? No. He did something far worse, at least in the eyes of many Britons. He committed a foul halfway through a closely fought World Cup game against Argentina Tuesday night. In retaliation for a shove in the back, Beckham kicked an opponent — in full view of the referee, who ejected him. This left England a player short — 10 men against Argentina's 11 — and cost the team a match that offered, in addition to the normal passion of combative soccer, the remembered tensions of the Falklands war 16 years ago.

Foolish as Beckham's foul was, it pales besides what was recorded in yesterday's tabloids, which should be required reading for anyone wishing to understand Britain and its relationship with soccer. Spread the pages on the dining-room table and they form a disconcerting tapestry. "Ten Heroic Lions, One Stupid Boy," fumed *The Mirror*. Inside, its soccer reporter declared, "The England top brass should tear the three lions from David Beckham's shirt this morning."



Beckham and Victoria Adams
Courtesy: 2000

Not to be outdone, *The Sun* invited readers to register their thoughts on a special phone line. The responses take us into the darkest recesses of English soccer. A 61-year-old caretaker from North London:

"Beckham should put his skirt back on and go and become the fifth Spice Girl." A 22-year-old nanny from Suffolk: "I don't know how he could do that to his country. He let the side down, and more impor-

tantly, the nation." A Leicester resident: "If he walked into my local [pub] today he would be lynched."

That last, chilling remark brings to mind the case of Andres Escobar, a Colombian player who in the last World Cup scored an "own goal" — accidentally deflecting the ball into his net — and was shot dead two days later in his hometown of Medellin.

It is chilling also for other reasons. The fury here comes not from Britain's psychopaths and hooligans, its bully-boys and skinheads, who have cut such a nasty swath through France during the tournament. It comes instead from everyman and -woman. When caretakers and nannies join in the fray, speaking angrily of lynchings and treason, one must wonder who has violated the rules of sport. Is it the player who committed a commonplace foul that, arguably, cost his country a game? Or his overheated compatriots who are baying for his blood?

Sodden with contrition, Beckham has said: "I will always regret my actions during last night's game. I have apologized to the England players and management, and I want every England supporter to know how deeply sorry I am."

Escobar expressed his remorse, too, although no real blame lay with him. Beckham has flown to New York, evidently seeking refuge in the hope that this city is on a different planet. We can, I think, assure him that it is.

Tunku Varadarajan is New York bureau chief of *The Times* of London.

Courtesy: New York Times

Green Politics Turtles, Shrimp and a Ban

by Anil Agarwal

Civil societies of democratic countries can achieve what trade sanctions cannot

INDIA, Pakistan, Thailand and Malaysia have won the shrimp-turtle case in the World Trade Organization (WTO) against the US government. The US had imposed a unilateral ban on the import of shrimp caught in a way that killed endangered turtles.

The US government had taken the action under its own National Endangered Species Act. A WTO dispute panel has judged that such a ban goes against the principles of free trade. It did not accept the US position that marine turtles are (1) migratory animals; (2) a global resource and subject to stewardship by the international society; and, (3) even though no multilateral body or resolution has authorised the US to take such action, the US has acted in a manner consistent with its obligations and has taken reasonable measures to reflect the will of the international community. Even as the US government has decided to ignore the WTO verdict, there is overwhelming support in the country to appeal the judgement.

The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has consistently opposed the use of trade sanctions to conserve the global environment because of the simple reason that only economically powerful nations can impose effective trade sanctions against less economically powerful nations.

This tool for bringing environmentally-errant nations to

task cannot be used by less economically powerful nations against the global economic powers, however bad their environmental track record might be. There can be no doubt that there is today a need for a system of global environmental governance, but this system must be built on rules, regulations, tools and modalities that are fair, just and equally accessible to all.

Though the Indian government has won its case in the WTO, it still comes out as an extremely hypocritical entity, saying one thing abroad and another at home. While the US government has no right to impose its domestic laws on any other nation, India, too, is bound by both its domestic laws and by its international legal commitments to protect its biodiversity.

This means that even as India was opposing the US in WTO, it should have taken serious steps to protect the Olive Ridley turtles along the Orissa Coast. And by all indications, the entire effort is a very simple one. The government simply had to insist that all trawlers catching shrimp must use a turtle excluder device. US environmentalists have even argued that their government is pre-

pared to provide these devices free. But trust the government of India and its arms like the ministry of environment and forests (MEF) to sit idle while the turtle massacre goes on.

In fact, this should not surprise us at all. The government of India is probably the most hypocritical government of the earth. Despite all the rhetoric of its politicians and its laws in favour of nature or of the poor, it has shown no respect for either.

The Gahirmatha turtle rookery on the Orissa coast, which is reputed to be the most important nesting site for the endangered Olive Ridley turtle in the world, is in a bad state. Yet one cannot hear any alarm bells ringing within the "Indian system". Almost as if the government has no interest even in implementing its own laws.

No mass nesting has taken place for two years now in Gahirmatha, where half-a-million turtles used to nest till recently. Surely, the government has the capacity to foresee such disasters and take advance action. The key principle of environmental management is prevention and precaution.

On May 23, *The Indian Express* carried an item saying that Orissa's chief minister J B

Patnaik has decided to set up a "high-level committee" with the state's chief bureaucrat as its chair to protect sea turtles. God bless the man? Why did he not wait for a few more years? And who knows if the man even today has the conviction to do something about it apart from setting up a committee of government busybodies? The government of India has rarely ever woken up until an ecological crisis begins to stare in its face.

When the US had imposed its ban on the import of turtle-unfriendly shrimp from India, the CSE had a small spat with the Earth Island Institute, a US non-governmental organisation that had played an important role in pushing the US government to take this action.

While arguing that the Earth Island Institute had overstepped its role as a member of the civil society by asking its government to take unilateral action against India, CSE had suggested that the honourable thing for it would have been to work with India's civil society to force its government to take appropriate action. Such an approach would have been best for two democratic societies working together in a globalised world.

And indeed this very approach will save the endangered Olive Ridley turtles. It is time for the Indian civil society to force the Indian political system to respect its own laws.

CSE/Down To Earth Features

Shrinking Cover

INDIA lost about 5,550 sq km of forest cover in the last two years. According to the State of Forest Report 1997, brought out by the Ministry of Environ-

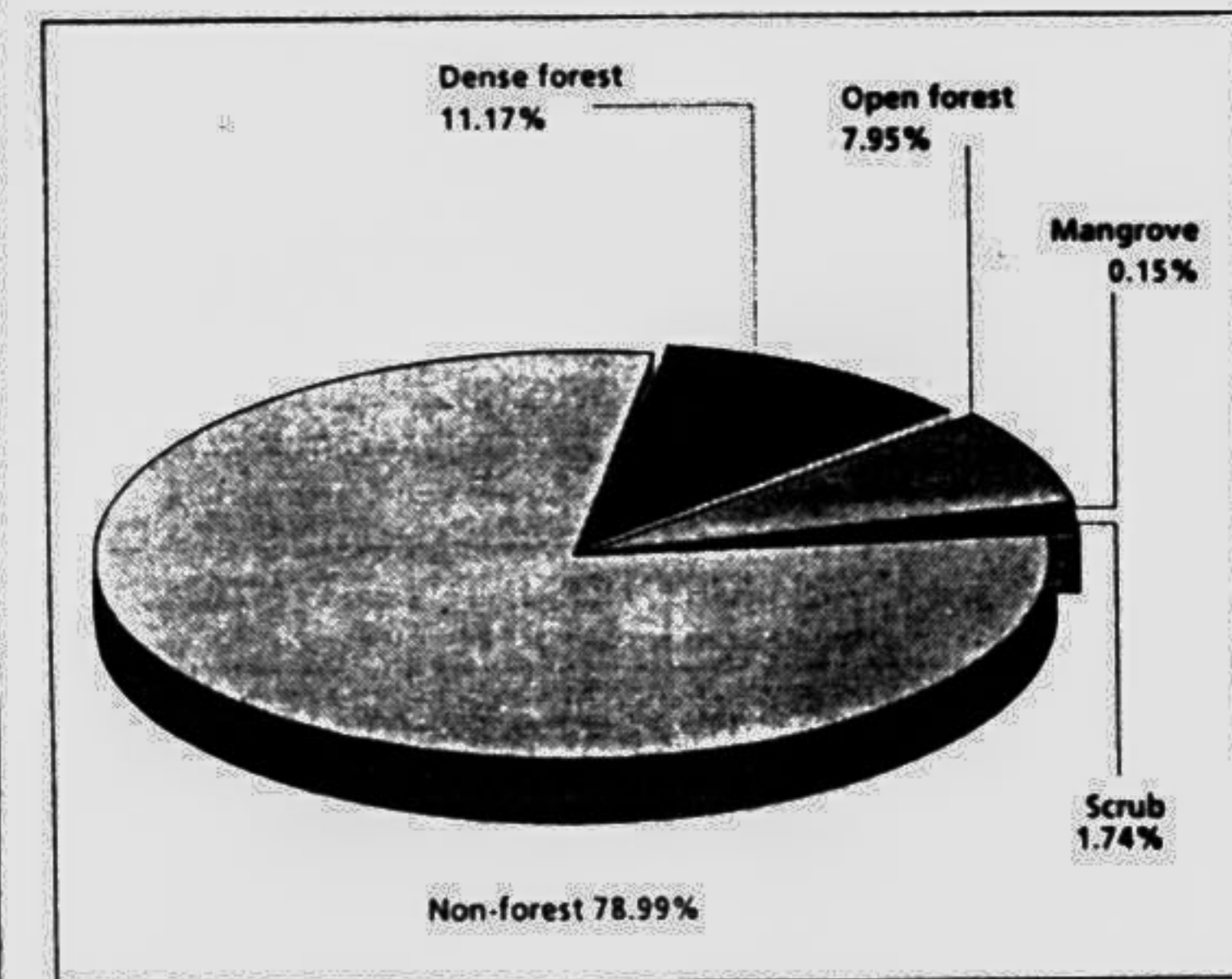
ment and Forests, forest cover has gone down from 6,38,879 sq km in 1995 to 6,33,397 sq km in 1997. Of the total of 3,969 sq km forest lost in Madhya Pradesh,

deforestation in the tribal areas accounted for about 2,186 sq km. In Andhra Pradesh, about 3,455 sq km of forests in tribal areas were lost. The trend of

forest loss continues in the northeast as well, with Assam losing 237 sq km — about 1 per cent of its forests.

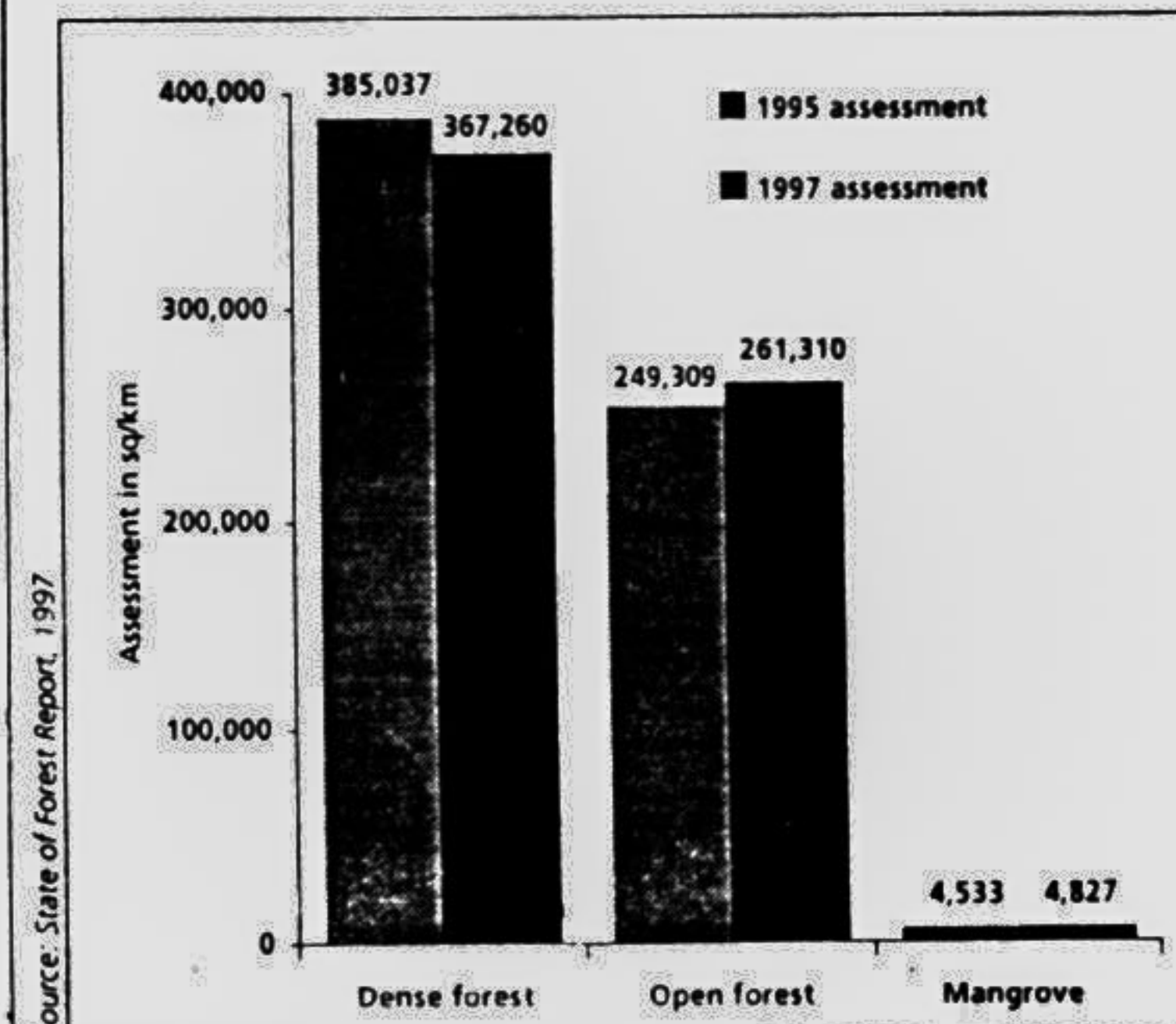
Forest Cover

The loss of the dense forest — forests with tree cover of over 40 per cent — is a cause for alarm



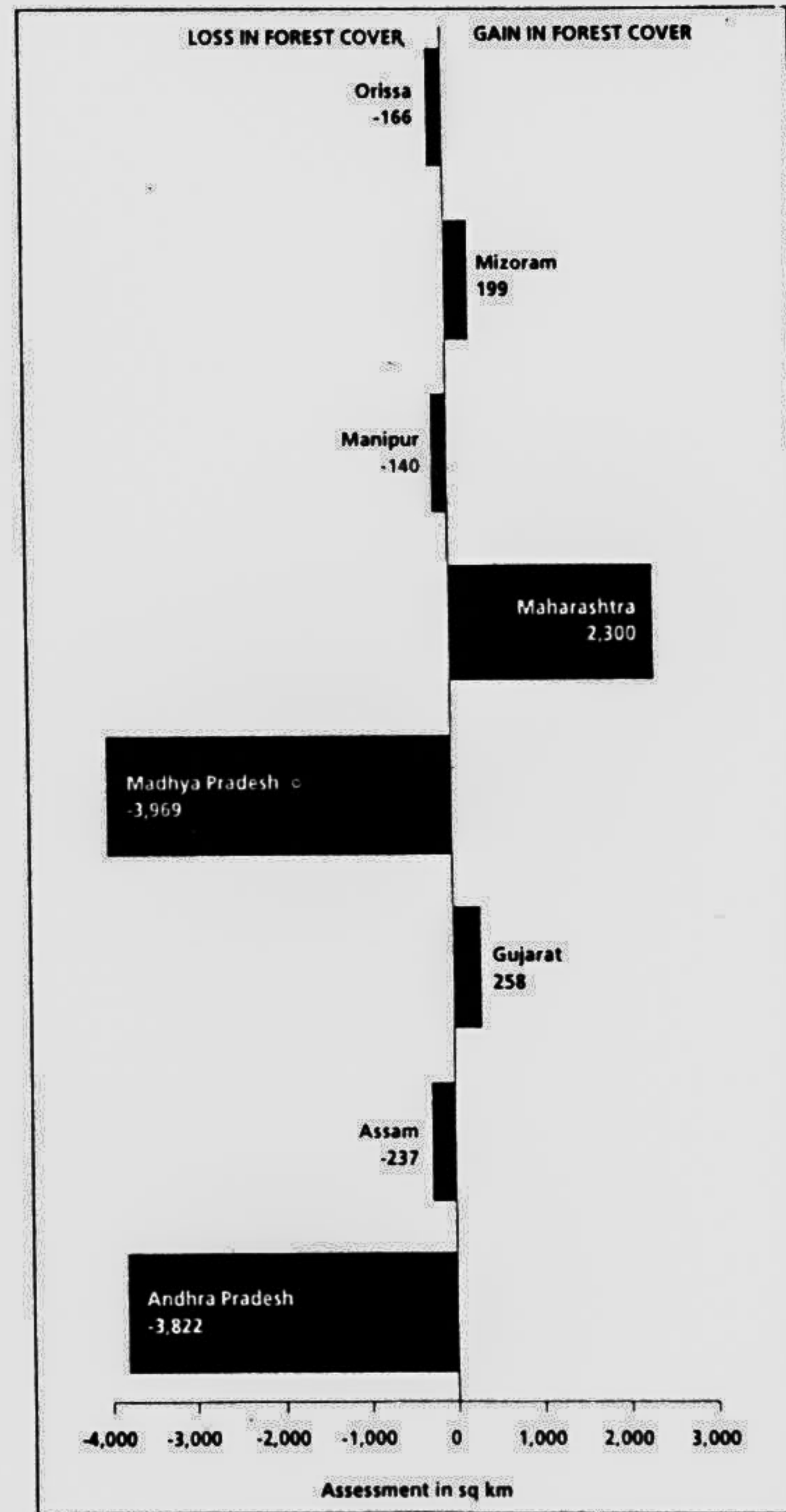
Vanishing Green

While dense forest decreased in the last two years, mangrove and open forest increased marginally



Winners And Losers

Maximum loss in forest cover was in Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh



Forests Burning

THE most devastating wildfires in seven decades are raging across Mexico and Central America, gobbling millions of acres of forests and grasslands, closing international airports and pushing blankets of smoke into Texas and gritty haze as far away as Oklahoma, Wisconsin and Georgia.

Smoke from the fires has forced government officials in Mexico and Texas to declare health emergencies, and it was blamed for an aeroplane crash in Guatemala this weekend that killed three men.

At least 50 people have died in Mexico as a result of the fires, most of them while battling the blazes. The fires, which are burning across the

region from Nicaragua north through El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and throughout Mexico, are threatening centuries-old Mayan ruins in Guatemala and have incinerated monkeys, birds and rare plants in some of Mexico's most fragile biospheres.

Government authorities are blaming everyone from peasant farmers to drug traffickers to

careless cigarette-pitching motorists for contributing to the fires. The smog has edged over the border into the US, darkening skies in Texas, Florida, Georgia, north to Oklahoma, Missouri and Wisconsin, according to Jeff McQueen of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

CSE/Down To Earth Features

Mir in Mire

THE old, frail and forgetful Mir spacecraft will be abandoned by December 1999, say Russian space officials. Cosmonauts on board would begin to manoeuvre it into a lower orbit in May. The officials say that a module would be launched towards Mir that would carry fuel to propel

the station towards the Earth. The station will fall into the Earth and crash into the sea.

Mir's demise is being taken as a sign of Russia's declining fortunes in space. The end of Mir will mark the end of Rus-

sia's world leadership in orbital space exploration," said Yuri Semyonov, president of RKK Energia, the company that built Mir and oversees it.

Mir is the world's only orbiting manned space station. With

12 years afloat, the space station has already surpassed its original life expectancy of five years. During this period, nearly 100 cosmonauts have served the space station.

The problem at Mir started when a supply vehicle collided with Mir, poking holes in the space station.

TOM & JERRY



By Hanna-Barbera

James Bond

