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Workshop Report

By

Achal Mehra
CDG-AMIC-COMCON-UKM

WORKSHOP ON MASS MEDIA AND THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Kuala Lumpur, September 28 - October 10, 1987

WORKSHOP REPORT

by the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre for the

Carl Duisberg-Gesellschaft e.V.

Report prepared by

Dr. Achal Mehra
INTRODUCTION

Forest areas thirteen times the size of Singapore are cleared annually in Malaysia. Half the country's forest area has already been logged. Forty-two of the country's rivers have been declared "dead," incapable of supporting marine life because of pollution. Nearly one-third of the mangrove coastal area in Kuala Selangor has been eroded.

Like so many other countries in the continent and elsewhere in the world, rapid industrialization is threatening Malaysia's most valuable natural resources - water, air, soil, animals and plant life - with irreversible damage and destruction. Environment consciousness on a global scale has become a pressing social need. The mass media - print, radio and television - have a major, perhaps the most significant, role to play in alerting the peoples of the world to the hazards of environmental pollution.

Unfortunately, most journalists, print and broadcast, lack both the knowledge and special skills necessary to report environmental problems. Environmental reporting, to the extent that it exists, is devoted largely to superficial, sometimes sensational, reporting of crises and news events. Such reporting detracts from the more important underlying issues and causes, consequences and prevention.

Part of the problem lies in the inability of journalists to grasp the complexity of environmental issues and the lack of information sources. Journalists need information and sources who can make technical jargon understandable to them so that they in turn can explain it to their publics.
The fourth workshop in the series on Mass Media and the Protection of the Environment held in Kuala Lumpur attempted precisely that task. The workshop was organised by the Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft e.V. (CDG) in cooperation with the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Communicators for Conservation (COMCON).

The twin objective of the workshop was to impart basic theoretical knowledge on the environment and practical experience on environmental reporting to participating journalists. The expectation was that once the participants were exposed to the environmental problems and the consequences of the problems upon people they would be motivated to report on them. In the process, the journalists would also be sensitised to the special reporting skills needed to write on a specialised subject like the environment.

PARTICIPANTS

Twenty-five participants from Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand participated in the workshop. Nine of the participants were drawn from the print media, nine from radio and seven from television. The participant profile by country was as follows: Malaysia 14; Nepal 4; Philippines 3; Sri Lanka 1; and Thailand 3. A full list of participants is attached as Appendix 1.

70% of the 25 participants were male and 30% female. The average age of the participants was 35.7 years, with the youngest being 25 years and the

\[1\] Data for this section is drawn from submissions of 15 participants.
oldest 47 years. All the participants had extensive experience in the media. The average work experience of the participants was 12.2, with the minimum being 3 years and the maximum 22 years.

Participants' Sex

- Female (30%)
- Male (70%)

Participants' Age

- 25 - 30 (33%)
- 31 - 35 (20%)
- 36 - 40 (20%)
- 41+ (27%)
More than half of the participants held a bachelors degrees. Another 13% held a master's degree. 20% percent of the participants held a high school certificate or under. The academic qualifications of the remaining 13% were not known.
67% of the participants were drawn from government organisations. Almost all the participants from radio and television were from government media as broadcasting is monopolised by the government in most Asian countries. 28% of the participants were drawn from private media, mostly from print. One participant was drawn from an international organization.

All the participants shared a very high commitment toward the environment and the role of the media in covering it. Asked to rate environmental problems on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is very important and 10 unimportant) they gave an average score of 1.9, and the coverage of environment problems by the media as 2.
How important do you rate coverage of environmental matters by the media, on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is highest.

How important do you rate environmental matters on a scale of 1 to 10. (where 1 is highest)
Nearly 93% of the participants said they had dealt with environmental matters in their reporting, but all of them said that their knowledge of the environment was only average.

More than half the participants said their environmental message had reached their target audience. The remaining were either unaware, or felt their message did not reach their audience or did so only sometimes. Nearly three in four said that they received feedback on their environmental reporting. 6% said they did not; 13% said they did so sometimes and 6% were unsure.
Does your message on environmental matters reach intended target audience?

Yes (53%)
Not Known (13%)
No (7%)
Sometimes (27%)

Have you received direct/indirect feedback on your writings?

Yes (75%)
No reply (6%)
Sometimes (13%)
No (6%)
WORKSHOP FACULTY

CDG Project Manager Mr. Eberhard Stottele served as the Workshop Project Manager while AMIC Secretary General Mr. Vijay Menon and COMCON Chairman Mr. Domingo Abadilla served as Workshop Chairmen. Dr. Syed Arabi, Chairman, UKM Department of Communication, served as Workshop Director and Dr. Achal Mehra, AMIC's Senior Programme Specialist, served as Associate Workshop Director.

Dr. Hans-Dietrich Kuckuk, Head of Asia English Section, Deutsche Welle, headed the radio team; Mr. Raja Ahmad Alauddin, lecturer, Department of Communication, UKM, led the television team; and Dr. Achal Mehra, AMIC, led the print team. Ms. Mazni Buyong, lecturer, Department of Communication, UKM, served as workshop coordinator.

In addition, the workshop drew upon the expertise of several resource persons, including: Dr. Ng. Francis, Forest Research Institute of Malaysia; Dr. Goh Kiam Seng, Director, Department of Environment; Dr. Ahmad Badri Mohamad, Associate Professor, UKM; Mr. Gurmit Singh, President, Environment Protection Society; Mr. Jamaluddin Jahi, Associate Professor, UKM; Dr. A. Sasekumar, Zoology Department, Universiti Malaya; Dr. Nasiman Sapari, Department of Environment, Universiti Pertanian Malaysia; Dr. Richard Peter Lim, Associate Professor, Zoology Department, Universiti Malaya; Mr. Monogaran Maniam, Management Consultant, Malaysian Institute of Management; Mr. Maketab Mohamed, Environmental Control Officer; Dr. Tho Yow Pong, Director, Economy Technology Division, Forest Research Institute of Malaysia; and Mr. Mohd. Akhir Osman, Senior District Engineer, Drainage and Irrigation Department.
complete list of resource persons is attached as Appendix 2.)

PROGRAMME

The workshop was held from September 28, 1987, to October 10, 1987, at the Hotel Merlin, Kuala Lumpur.

Opening Ceremony

Inaugurating the workshop, the Deputy Minister for Information Mr. Jaffrey bin Railey, representing the Malaysian Minister for Information Mr. Y.B. Dato Mohamed Rahmat, stressed the important role of the media in creating awareness among the people of the importance of a clean environment.

He said the Malaysian government was committed to a clean environment, pointing to the various campaigns undertaken by the government in this area. He rejected the notion that environment problems are the concern solely of the developed countries as development needs preceded environment concerns. "The government is aware of the need to achieve a balance between the need to achieve development and the need to maintain the environment. Indeed the government is concerned that in the long run there should be proper maintenance of the environment for the well-being of Malaysia. No society can continue to exist if it destroys the environment - an environment that provides sustenance for the population. Destruction of the environment for its sake is not only bad, but, as a Muslim, it is against Islamic teaching."

He asked the media to publicize campaigns like the anti-litter and garbage
disposal drives, and environment laws and regulations. "We sometimes do not realize that the sum of an individual action may eventually equate the sum of million actions."

An impediment to mass media coverage of environmental matters, he said, was the lack of trained personnel to cover a complex issue. "I therefore welcome the efforts of the organizers in organizing this workshop for journalists," he said.

He said journalists can be effective in communicating their messages if they have a proper perspective, understand the complex issues and the interrelationship of the environment with all facets of human life, such as the economy, health and agriculture. "After all, the process of communication becomes more meaningful if communicators, that is journalists, are able to communicate the contents to the receivers in a clear holistic picture," he said.

In his welcome address, AMIC's Secretary General Mr. Vijay Menon noted that some of the dirtiest industries are growing most rapidly in the developing countries of Asia, creating problems of air and water pollution.

"Air and water pollution apart, we learn with increasing concern about the pernicious effects of agrotoxic chemicals such as pesticides and fertilisers. Agrotoxics are believed to affect human reproduction and cause cancers. While several pesticides are banned every year in the West as they are found to be hazardous to health, many developing countries sadly lack information on the risks associated with these products and processes," he said.

Mr. Menon said that as hungry people have no time to think about conservation, it is the responsibility of governments to inform their rural populations of the importance of conserving natural resources. "We feel that communicators and communication have a critical role to play in sensitizing not
only policy makers and officials but also ordinary citizens to the nature and magnitude of environmental problems," he added. He felt that the workshop would not only sensitize the media, but also sharpen the skills of participating journalists in environmental reporting.

CDG Project Manager Mr. Eberhard Stottele also stressed the important role of the media in creating environmental awareness in his welcoming address. He said that the population explosion, urbanization, industrialization and intensive use of agricultural land for traffic, industry and settlements, threatened to irreversibly damage and destroy the earth's most important resources, like water, air, soil, animals and plant life. Only global awareness can enable us to reverse this trend, he said. "Particular importance must be attached to the mass media - radio, television and the press - with regard to this informative and educational work as their programmes and information reach practically the entire population."

Unfortunately, he said, journalists lack the specialized knowledge to produce educational and informative programmes. "Consequently, they either treat this area in a totally inadequate manner, or ignore it altogether." It is therefore necessary, he said, to give print and broadcast journalists an "opportunity to break down this lack of knowledge and to support them in the practical areas of their work, imparting specialised knowledge connected with the solving of fundamental problems relating to development."

Noting that the "hole" in the ozone layer caused by "killer gases" emanating from chemicals used routinely by people is a "ticking bomb," Mr. Stottele said that all journalists need to help the global community by alerting them to the dangers of environmental pollution.
"Every broadcaster and journalist must have the responsibility to inform the public immediately of these grave facts," he concluded.

In his opening speech, UKM Deputy Vice Chancellor Dr. Jalani Sukaimi said that as the participating journalists would be exposed to the full complexity of environment-related issues, they could write analytically for the general public. Dr. Jalani noted the "dilemma" of speedy development as it often causes dislocations in the environment. "We have somehow to balance the need to develop fast and the need to conserve the environment. Eventually what matters most is how we manage the environment when we speed up our development," he said.

In their opening speeches, Dr. Bernd Rinnert, representing the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr. Syed Arabi Idid, representing UKM, and Mr. Domingo Abadilla, Chairman of COMCON, also cautioned about the dangers of environmental pollution and stressed the need for print and broadcast journalists to create global awareness among the population about environmental problems.

Lectures

The workshop was initiated by Mr. Stottele and Dr. Idid, who introduced the workshop objectives and the programme to the participants.

Later in the afternoon, Dr. Ng. Francis, of the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia, Dr. Goh Kiam Seng, Director, Department of Environment, Dr. Ahmad Badri Mohamad, Associate Professor, UKM, and Mr. Gurmit Singh, President, Environment Protection Society, participated in a spirited panel discussion on environmental problems in Malaysia. A highlight of the panel discussion was a lively exchange between Dr. Goh and Mr. Singh over enforcement of environmental
protection laws in Malaysia. The panel discussion was followed by a meet the press style question and answer session during which participants were able to quiz the panelists on the environmental situation in Malaysia.

The second day was principally devoted to presentations by resource persons on environmental problems. It began with a presentation by Dr. Jamaluddin Jahi on "Post Merdeka Development and Air Quality Degradation in Malaysia." In his presentation Dr. Jahi traced post-independence development and presented several statistics to demonstrate that air quality had deteriorated in several urban areas since independence. He said that the geographical location of Malaysia restricted the dispersive capacity of the atmosphere creating a high potential for pollution, which combined with a rapid increase in pollution sources during the past 10 to 15 years, had given cause for grave concern over air quality. He also discussed pollution sources and emissions, air pollution potential, the effect on cities, air quality, and the Air Quality Act of 1974.

Speaking on "Mangroves and Marine Life," Dr. A. Sasekumar identified the many benefits of mangroves and the consequences of their large-scale destruction on marine life. He discussed several specific examples of the benefits of mangroves and the consequences of their destruction upon the fishing industry in Malaysia. Dr. Nasiman Sapari, in his paper titled "Marine Pollution and Coastal Resources Sensitivity Index" said that domestic and commercial pollutants were endangering marine ecosystems. He said that mangrove forests, coral reefs and river estuaries are the most sensitive to marine pollution and pollution of these areas endangers the survival of several forms of marine lives dependant upon them.

Later, Dr. Richard Peter Lim magnified on that theme in his presentation
on "The Effects of Pollution on Freshwater Resources." He began by discussing the hydrological cycle and how clean water is made and then proceeded to discuss how water is polluted. Dr. Lim focused on the pollution of the Linggi River Basin in the state of Negri Sembilan, in Peninsular Malaysia. He said that "prudent development is the key to optimising the conservation of one's resources." To achieve this, he said, a comprehensive management strategy and overall water resource policy are necessary.

At the end of the day's sessions, the print, radio and television groups met separately to plan their production strategy for the following day.

October 1 was devoted to visits to the sites to familiarise the participants with the area so that they could select the topics they would focus on for their productions. The visit began by tracing the River Klang from its source, downstream to its polluted regions. Participants also visited villages affected by large-scale destruction of mangrove plantations both inland and in coastal areas. It concluded with a visit to the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia.

On Friday, Mr. Manogaran Maniam discussed Conservation Management. Mr. Maniam began by discussing the "Future Inter-relationship Between Environment and Technology - A Development Perspective," in which he said the future depended on the choices available and the decisions made. Development choices are more a question of technological choices rather than choices of the environment, he said. "There is no choice on the environment, obviously. We live here as here presents itself. We only have the choice to deteriorate it."

The focus of his talk was a 30-minute video presentation on pollution in the Linggi River. At the end of the video presentation he divided the participants into several groups to view the pollution problem from the perspective of
villagers, managers of plantations, oil palm refinery and water purification plant, town planning and development officers, and conservationists and naturalists. The objective of the exercise was to demonstrate the competing interests on environmental matters and it evoked a lively discussion among the participants.

In the afternoon, Mr. Maketab Mohamed spoke on the "River Klang: The Story of a Malaysian River." In his presentation he gave an overview of the environmental problems faced by the River Klang and presented the findings of an environmental study done on the river.

He was followed by Dr. Tho Yow Pong, who discussed "Deforestation and Reforestation." Dr. Tho said that intensive logging was endangering the life support system of Malaysia's rain forests. He cautioned against their "wasteful exploitation for immediate gains as the forest are vital and crucial to the well being and the quality of life in the years to come."

Participants met that evening to plan out their production strategy for the following day when they were to undertake field trips to report on environmental problems. The print and radio groups decided to focus on mangroves and river pollution and therefore decided to split themselves into two sub-groups one to cover each topic. The television crew decided to focus on pollution in the River Gombak.

The following day was devoted to field trips. Dr. Richard Peter Lim accompanied the television crew and the radio and print sub-groups covering river pollution. He conducted experiments to gauge pollution in the Gombak and provided information on river pollution in the villages visited by the teams. Dr. A. Sasekumar accompanied the print and radio sub-groups covering mangrove
destruction. The team visited several villages and sites both inland and along coastal areas to study the effect of the destruction of mangroves. They also met with villagers and fishermen to discuss the causes and consequences of mangrove destruction. Over the next five days, the three groups prepared their print, radio and television productions.

Print

The print group comprised of nine members, four from Malaysia, one each from Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, and two from the Philippines. The group produced a six-page bilingual tabloid titled One World. Four pages were in English and two in Bahasa Malay, entitled Alam Kita (literally One World).

The print group met on September 29 and 30 to decide its editorial policy and reporting strategy. It was decided that as the newspaper's target audience was villagers affected by river pollution and mangrove destruction, it would attempt to focus on the consequences of these acts upon people. The newspaper's impact would be greatest, the group decided, if the harm caused by environmental degradation could be explained to villagers through illustrations drawn from their own experience. Toward that objective, it was decided before the team set out that it would gather information on the specific impact of mangrove destruction and river pollution upon the people. The key question, it was decided would be "How does environmental degradation impact the people living in the area?"

The group used the orientation trip on October 1 to villages on the Gombak and the Klang and the mangrove sites to identify the consequences upon the villagers that the newspaper would focus on. The following day, the specific
stories were identified by the print group and the assignments to the reporters made. The focus, it was decided, would be the effect of river pollution upon fishermen; flooding of rivers because of clogging and siltation; the consequences of coastal erosion because of mangrove destruction and the consequences of mangrove destruction on the fishery industry. At this stage, the group also settled upon a tentative division of editorial responsibilities.

The print group broke up into two sub-groups, one to cover river pollution and the second to cover mangrove destruction. The two groups visited villages along the Klang and Gombak rivers and villages adjoining mangrove plantations on October 3. During the field visits they interviewed villagers, village chiefs and government officials. They also had the benefit of advice from resource persons specialising on river pollution and mangroves, who accompanied them during the trip.

The group met the following day to take stock of the information that had been gathered. The next two days were spent writing up the stories and interviewing officials for additional information on questions that had arisen during the field trip.

On October 6, the foci of the group's activities shifted to UKM. The group typeset all the stories and then edited them on a Macintosh desk top publishing system. Because of complications with the electronic layout system with which members of the group were unfamiliar, the group had to finally resort to manual layout. The final page make-up was completed at 4 a.m. on the morning of October 7. It was sent to the printers shortly thereafter.

The articles published in the newspaper reflected the editorial philosophy agreed upon by the group. The three stories on the front page, for instance, were
on how coastal erosion had endangered Malaysia's small fishermen, how pollution was killing marine life in the River Gombak and how clogging of the River Klang was causing flash floods in Kuala Lumpur. Other articles focused on how coastal erosion caused by mangrove destruction had driven villagers from their homes in Bagan Pasir and government efforts on environment education and efforts to save mangroves.

Articles also discussed citizen participation in environmental matters, including how one village's protest against a dam project led to its ultimate cancellation. The newspaper also featured interviews with environmentalists on public apathy and the need for balanced development. Also featured were simplified tables on the benefits of mangroves and the consequences of river pollution. The newspaper also featured an exclusive interview with the Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment Datuk Amar Stephen Yong, in which he disclosed a new, sweeping proposal for preserving mangrove plantations.

An innovation in the newspaper was a feature titled "Action Line," which served as a channel of communication between the villagers and the government authorities. Concerns raised by villagers during their meetings with members of the print team were taken to the Director General of the Department of the Environment Dr. Goh Kiam Seng for response. Their concerns and his response served as a two-way channel of communication, which is often missing from the mass media.

Some of the articles in the Bahasa section were translations of those in the English section. But the Bahasa paper also carried original pieces as well, including the lead column, which recounted a fisherman's thoughts on how fishing times had changed over the years.
The print group encountered major production difficulties, which affected the quality of its final product. The newspaper was written and typeset on a Macintosh desktop publishing system by members of the print group, who had no experience in electronic layout and design. Ultimately, the newspaper was laid out mechanically, but in the absence of proper tools for manual layout, the quality of the final product left something to be desired. Nonetheless, the group produced a respectable production. Unfortunately, the newspaper production does not do full justice to the quality of its contents and the strong editorial philosophy that formed the backbone of the newspaper.

The production difficulties did give an opportunity to several members of the group to get exposed to desktop publishing for the first time and that experience was a side benefit of the workshop.

The strongest element of the print group's production, however, was the quality of the stories, which were packed with illustrative examples and information. It is a reflection of the newspaper's strong editorial content that articles published by the newspaper prompted several reports in the local media. The newspaper's report on the Klang River was carried by the national news agency Bernama and published in several newspapers. Other articles prompted reports on mangrove destruction and coastal erosion and even led to governmental action (See Appendix 4).

Radio

The radio group consisted of nine members -- five staff members of Radio-TV Malaysia, two from Nepal, and one each from Thailand and the
Philippines. All the participants had experience -- some extensive -- in producing radio programmes. All of them were fluent in English.

The group used the opportunity during the plenary sessions, at which resource persons discussed major environmental problems in Malaysia, to record interviews with the experts. The group met on September 30 to discuss possible topics and formats for the planned radio productions in preparation for the orientation trip along the Gombak and Klang rivers and the mangrove sites the following day. After the orientation trip, the radio group on October 2 decided to produce:

a) A 30-minute documentary in Bahasa for a rural audience on mangrove destruction and its effects on the environment and on the people living on the coast.

b) A 30-minute feature in English on river pollution and its consequences especially for the mangrove forests. Also to be included in this programme was the deliberate destruction of mangroves by man.

After these joint decisions by all its members on the planned productions, the radio group divided into two sub-groups. The Bahasa sub-group comprised of three participants, the English-speaking sub-group of six participants.

Field trips were undertaken on October 3 and 4 by the sub-groups and individually to various locations along the Gombak and Klang rivers and to the west coast in the state of Selangor to carry out research, to record interviews in Bahasa and English as well as sound effects. Two cassette-recorders made available by the CDG and one by RTM were used for this purpose.

Between October 6 and 8, the two sub-groups were busy listening to the recorded material, having it transferred from cassette on to reel tape in the
studios of RTM in Kuala Lumpur and editing it to requirements. At the same time, the scripts for the two programmes were written. Scripts and sound material were then matched, music selected, and the narrators and speakers rehearsed their texts and parts. Finally, the Bahasa documentary and the English feature were produced in the RTM studios. The work was completed without a hitch according to schedule on October 7 and 8.

The 26-minute documentary in Bahasa was titled "Mangroves - A Natural Habitat." The 24.40 minute feature in English was entitled "Water - The Source of Life." In addition, a 15-minute documentary produced by Elizabeth Ullibary entitled "COMCON - Communicators for Conservation" on the activities of COMCON was also prepared during the workshop. This special programme was also produced in the RTM studios during the workshop.

On the final day, all members of the radio group were given cassettes of the radio programme produced at the workshop along with their certificates. It is expected that the English feature will be broadcast by the home stations of some of the participants. The Bahasa production was scheduled to be broadcast by RTM on October 18 as part of a regular series called "Perspectives."

Television

The television group comprised of seven members, all but one from RTM. The sole foreign participant was from Television Nepal. All the participants had extensive experience in the medium.

The group met for the first time on September 29 to decide on the topic and the direction of its production. It decided to focus on river pollution in part
because it was a problem of immediate concern in Malaysia and also because it felt that the visual impact of the problem would be greatest. The group considered the problem of deforestation as well, but decided against it because it was unsure if the appropriate facilities for production would be available and also whether lighting would be adequate.

During the field trip on October 1, the group selected tentative shooting sites and made appointments for interviews. The following day, in preparation for the production trips on October 3 and 4, the group settled on a rough script and the people to be interviewed. As the documentary was targeted at villagers, it was decided that the sources of information and speakers would principally be drawn from among the villagers themselves. It was also decided that the language used in the broadcast would be simple and technical terminology would be avoided.

The group undertook field trips on October 3 with Dr. Richard Peter Lim, an expert on river pollution. It shot film at the site and returned that evening to have the film processed. The group returned to the sites the following day for additional footage.

The films were developed at RTM studios, the footage viewed, the script finalised first in Bahasa and then in English, and the dubbing and mixing done by the group with assistance from technicians at RTM over the next three days. The final 15-minute production was titled "Gombak: The Past Glory." The programme was originally produced in Bahasa, but it was also translated into English.

The production problems of the television group were complicated by the fact that all the shooting was done on film, which then had to be processed, transferred, spliced and transferred again. This unusual system was dictated by the production practice at RTM, which relies principally on films. Thanks to
considerable help from RTM, the complicated production went without a hitch, however.

The television documentary in Bahasa is expected to be aired over RTM. Each COMCON chapter received one copy of the English television documentary on COMCON on the final day of the workshop.

Evaluation of Productions

On the morning of October 9, the Bahasa Malay versions of the print, radio and television productions were presented to a group of about 65 villagers, mostly school children in Kampong Cincin, 15 kms from Kuala Lumpur for evaluation.

All the productions were generally well received. The villagers said that the television documentary exposed them to the magnitude of the problem in the Gombak and that they had not until then fully comprehended the severity of the pollution problem in the river. They found the documentary too short however and suggested that more information of this nature should be made available to them so that they could be better informed.

The Bahasa radio programme was also well received by the villagers. They found the programme very informative, but they said they would like to know more about the causes of the problems and what they could do about it. They felt the government should give them more information on such matters. Because the radio production followed the television show and was quite long, a certain fatigue factor seemed to have set into the group at the end of the programme. Further, a member of the group discussed the programme before the presentation, which
discouraged spontaneous response as the participants were somewhat conditioned by the earlier discussion.

Villagers could comprehend only the two Bahasa pages of the newspaper. A member of the print team, however, translated and discussed the English language articles as well with them. The villagers were particularly attracted to the tables on the uses of mangroves and the consequences of river pollution. They said that they had never realised that mangroves had so many benefits and that the information had widened their minds. The villagers had few comments regarding the newspaper as it did not focus upon their village and had few stories related to them.

Villagers found the language and level of all the productions comprehensible, indicating that the workshop had met its objective of communicating at the level of the participants. But the villagers criticised the productions for their failure to suggest remedies. The productions should not be only informative, but should suggest alternatives as well. It is not enough to create awareness, but suggest what to do about the problem. For that reason, they felt, the government should be informed about the problem so that it could do something about it.

The villagers acknowledged that the Gombak was polluted and that it was dead as far as they were concerned. They blamed the pollution on hospital and industries discharging waste into the river. They themselves did not use the river, they said, and relied upon piped water. The alternative, they said, was to tame the river for water and for fishing. There was also some resentment among the villagers that the television production had focused upon them. As many other rivers are similarly polluted, they asked, why had the programme not discussed
the problems with those rivers. They felt the programme over-emphasised the problem in the Gombak, making them and their village appear negative and gave a bad impression about them.

In the afternoon, the productions were presented to the workshop and evaluated by the workshop participants. In general all the productions were received well.

The print group noted that production problems had hindered the newspaper's layout and design, but that the paper was strong in editorial content. To a question why the newspaper had not used more cartoons or illustrations in the newspaper, the group replied that the use of such illustrations is patronizing to villagers and that this point had been made at the Nepal workshop by the villagers themselves. Instead, the newspaper attempted to focus on providing stories that related to the people who read them.

Questions were also raised regarding the newspaper's pagination system and the sparing use of bylines. The group said the pagination reflected the group's desire to have the newspaper distributed both as a bilingual paper as well as separately. Some bylines were dropped for space reasons, others were dropped because of extensive rewriting.

The television production was received exceedingly well and the point was made that it was of good professional quality. Some production glitches were pointed out, but it was felt that the show made a strong impact. It was also suggested that scientific terminology should be explained or simplified in the script. The television group indicated that it planned to work further on the documentary and that it hoped that segments of the programme would be screened over RTM.
The two radio productions were considered to be aimed at the right target audience, although it was suggested that their laudable attempt to integrate water pollution and mangroves might have confused some listeners; it might have been better to have treated the two subjects separately. The length of the productions and the complexity of the language was also a subject of some debate among the workshop participants. The group leader said the productions were of good professional standard. The radio group as a whole worked in a harmonious atmosphere with determination, discipline and team spirit, he said, so that the tasks could be fulfilled.

Closing Ceremony

On the final day, the newspaper, and the English radio and television productions were presented to a distinguished audience that included the Deputy Minister of Science Technology and Environment Y.B. Encik Law Hieng Ding.

In his closing remarks, the Minister said the quality of the workshop productions was commendable. He said that the workshop was both timely and important. "Environmental problem is no longer a subject that anyone can take lightly . . . [Everyone must] commit himself in protecting the environment from pollution," he said.

He said that his ministry had identified a four-prong approach to environmental pollution, including research on the environment, communication to instill awareness among the populace, education of the young to create appreciation for the environment and implementation of anti-pollution regulations.
"Among the four approaches," the Minister said, "communication and education are the most important but the most difficult to achieve as they deal with the masses. To educate and inform the masses, we need communication skills and knowledge, and it has to be a continuous process. People must be reminded often enough on the importance of the environment. On top of that, every campaign must be carefully planned so that it will achieve its primary purpose of inculcating civic consciousness of the environment. I urge all of you to make conscientious efforts to ensure that our communication channels and education programmes are fully implemented. The government alone cannot handle all these responsibilities. Participation from every quarter, especially the mass media, practitioners, academicians and private sectors is most needed."

He said CDG, UKM and AMIC's contribution to the workshop was "exemplary" and he appealed for greater cooperation from research bodies and scholars to combat environmental pollution.

FRG's Bernt Rinnert, AMIC's Vijay Menon, and UKM's Jalani Sukaimi and Syed Arabi Idid also addressed the closing ceremony and thanked the organisers and the participants for a very successful workshop.

Subsequently, the workshop met for a farewell session at which time certificates were handed out to the participants. Each radio participant was also given a cassette of the English radio documentary. Each COMCON chapter also received a copy of a video documentary on COMCON.
COMCON

The workshop provided an opportunity for COMCON, established in 1984 in Manila, to advance its goals and objectives. Members of the various national chapters met several times during the workshop to discuss the organization's future. A formal meeting of the country representatives of COMCON was held on October 8. In addition, a presentation on COMCON was also made at a plenary session at which time a documentary on the organization prepared during the workshop was presented to the participants.

At the end of the workshop, COMCON issued a press release affirming its commitment to protecting the environment. It said the voluntary grouping of journalists, presently composed of 60 members, would strengthen both the national and international network to facilitate exchanges of environmental information between members. It proposed to do so "by increasing the frequency of information exchange, recruiting more members and getting funding from international agencies."

At the Country Representatives' Meeting it was decided that COMCON-Manila would facilitate information exchanges among members and in May 1988 it would produce a report containing press clippings and scripts of radio tapes exchanged during the period. COMCON also decided to publish a bi-monthly newsletter. Each COMCON chapter received a tape of the radio and television documentary on the organisation at the final session. Minutes of COMCON's October 8 meeting as well as information about COMCON is attached as Appendix 5.
WORKSHOP EVALUATION

In general, the workshop was very well received by the participants. The following is a tabular break-up of the participants' evaluation of various elements of the workshop on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 was the best possible:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Value of Workshop to You</th>
<th>AVERAGE 8.7</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1</td>
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Programme Design and Content

AVERAGE 7.9

Presentation by Resource Persons

AVERAGE 7.4
Field Visits

AVERAGE 6.6

Workshop Facilities

AVERAGE 7.2
Workshop Organisation

**AVERAGE 8.1**

Hotel Accommodation

**AVERAGE 8.3**
Time Allocation for Papers

AVERAGE 7.1

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Time Allocation for Productions

AVERAGE 7.6

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Time Allocation for Field Trips

AVERAGE 6.6

Participants' Contribution to Workshop

AVERAGE 7.9
Open Discussions

AVERAGE 7.6

Opportunities for Exchanging Ideas with Fellow Participants

AVERAGE 7.7
Informal Contacts with Team and Lecturers

AVERAGE 7.2

Cooperation Within Group

AVERAGE 8.1
Media Production

**AVERAGE 7.9**

Relevance of Workshop to Your Work

**AVERAGE 8.4**
Workshop Papers

AVERAGE 7.7

Production Facilities

AVERAGE 7.5
Most participants found the lectures, discussions and field trips the most useful to their work. The participants also commended on-the-spot lectures provided by some resource persons, as well as the media productions and presentations. Some participants felt that on-the-spot lecture technique was especially educational and that the media presentations and open discussions allowed an opportunity for honest criticism to enable participants to improve their productions. The media presentations, some participants said, exposed them to new production techniques and production problems. It also initiated them to the special problem of communicating with special audiences, to interact with foreign participants, and to explore new ideas.

Which of the following did you find most useful* at the workshop

*Several participants indicated more than one choice)
As one participant put it, "From the expert lectures, I learnt many new things. During field trips I saw the places we learned about from the expert, could talk to the local people ... enjoyed sharing their problems. During the media presentation, by the confrontation of criticisms I gained the ideas which will help me produce my media production better."

Another wrote, "Expert lectures gave us background knowledge about environmental issues. Discussions allowed us to clarify things. Field trips as well as the on-spot lectures gave us clear idea of what lecturers were talking about."

All the participants were of the view that the number of participants was "about right." Most participants expressed considerable satisfaction at the contribution of the participants toward the workshop. However, there were suggestions that group discussions and informal contacts among participants be increased to promote participant contribution. It was suggested that tasks should be delegated to each participant to involve everyone in the workshop. It was felt that more group discussions should be organised to facilitate exchanges among the participants.

In general, the participants were satisfied with the quality of presentations by the resource persons. However, it was felt that some of the presentations were too technical and that in some instances the participants were bombarded with information. Overall, however, most participants rated the presentations very high.

The presentations on mangroves and marine life by Dr. A. Sasekumar, on marine pollution by Dr. Richard Peter Lim and by Manogaran Maniam on conservation management were singled out for special commendation by several
participants. Presentations that did not directly deal with the three selected topics of the workshop were considered too technical by some participants. It was recommended that more videos and films be used during these presentations.

It was suggested that on-site lectures should be increased and opportunities for having dinner with the resource persons should be created. The number of such lectures should be limited to no more than two a day. More time for tea would allow for greater interaction. Daily meetings for progress reports on group activities should be organised as should more interactions between groups.

Participants in general were satisfied with the time allocation for various segments of the workshop, but there were several suggestions for reducing the time for lectures and increasing that for field trips and productions. It was felt that each group should have been restricted to one topic to allow for more indepth treatment. But some of the participants noted that all media people must work against deadlines and time is never enough.

Participants did not feel that they were handicapped by language difficulties at the workshop. However, a handful said that it impeded their operations in the villages when they sought information from the villagers. But this was usually overcome with the help of local participants who assisted them in the translations.

The participants said that the greatest influence of the workshop on their work was in the area of research and in drawing their attention to particular environmental problems. More than three in four said that their work in these areas had been influenced by the workshop. Nearly 40% said the workshop had
affected their personal choice of topics. Many said the workshop had given them a stronger commitment, greater depth, and wider knowledge and perspective about specific environmental problems. Other changes cited included: broader understanding of the problems, the need for concerted media action in reporting these problems, and the sharing of ideas during production.

Some of the participants said the workshop made them realise the need for more indepth reporting instead of superficially reporting environmental problems from handouts. They were also made aware of production problems and the role of the media in making technical information understandable to ordinary people, ways to create audience awareness and the need to target their reporting to their audience. They also became more conscious of their responsibilities and commitments. They, of course, said the workshop had enabled them to gather information on the specific problems in the three areas discussed at the workshop.

Participants said the greatest difficulties they face in covering the environment is lack of research and data in their countries, apathy, business influences, political indecisiveness, and bureaucracy. The workshop, some said, had given them new knowledge and resolve. It had helped them identify and expand the range of contacts and places to look for data.

Most participants felt that the problem of reaching the right target group for reporting environmental issues had been either thoroughly or adequately dealt with at the workshop. However, 14% of them felt that it had been inadequate, with one participant noting that concepts such as "ordinary people," "common people" and "simple audiences" are misleading, pretentious and even arrogant. Another participant felt that the problems of pollution are tied to poverty and social
inequalities. These could not be addressed by the media by isolating messages to one community.

Was the right target group selected for this workshop?

Yes (48%)

Partly (48%)

No (4%)

Was the problem of reaching the right target group for reporting environmental issues adequately dealt with in the workshop?

Adequately (65%)

Thoroughly (20%)

Inadequately (15%)
Participants were somewhat split over the question if the right target audience had been selected for this workshop. While half of them thought it had, an equal number felt it had done so only partly. Apart from the rural audiences, they felt, policy makers and decision makers need to be targeted because they often control the mechanisms to address these problems. The participants identified the target audiences as school children, teenagers, businessmen, policy makers, implementing agencies, politicians, teachers and the lay public, rural and urban.

Asked to identify the subjects they would like to concentrate on in their work, participants identified a broad range of environmental problems. The Malaysian participants said they intended to pursue the problems of marine pollution, mangrove destruction, and deforestation. Others said they would pursue air and water pollution, pesticides, noise pollution, etc.

Participants had several suggestions for future workshops. One participant suggested that the next workshop should be held in a rural area to enable the participants to appreciate the problems better. Interestingly, this point was also made by UKM Deputy Vice Chancellor Jalani Sukalmi, who felt that reporters should focus themselves on a single village and identify all the problems and the impact of the problems upon one village. It was also suggested that the number of topics should be restricted to one per group to allow for more indepth treatment. Groups should also interact among each other to promote healthy criticism and ideas and to allow link up between teams. It was also felt that the number of earlier participants should be limited and organisers should interact equally with local participants. One participant felt that the co-ordinator should act only as a facilitator.
It was suggested that follow-up questionnaires should be sent to the participants to monitor their experiences on covering environmental issues after the workshop. All the participants expressed a willingness to respond to such a questionnaire.

CONCLUSION

The workshop in Malaysia exposed many participants to the problems of mangroves and river pollution for the first time. Several of them commented that they had never recognised the importance of mangroves until the workshop. The environmental problems in Malaysia are substantially different from the earlier three workshops in that population pressures in the country are not so great. The workshop was able to persuade participants that pollution problems are not the exclusive domain of over-populated countries.

The workshop helped motivate several participants to report on environmental matters. Many Malaysian participants promised to report more extensively about the environment and there was considerable enthusiasm among them for COMCON. In addition, as has already been pointed out, the workshop served to highlight environment problems to the Malaysian media which pursued several of the workshop stories independently (See attached clippings).

Participants recognised that environment problems need to be reported in depth and with care. Sensationalistic reporting in itself will not help the environment cause. The workshop impressed upon the participants the need to
recognise competing pressures, the causes and the consequences, both upon the environment and upon people.

Recommendations

1. The workshop afforded opportunities for exchanges among the participants on environmental problems in their countries. At future workshops, it would be desirable if participants were asked to write country reports on the environment problems being examined at the workshop. A special session can be set aside to discuss these reports.

This will make the participants better prepared for the workshop as they will have familiarised themselves somewhat with the problems as well as relate the workshop topics to the situation in their own countries. As it turned out, some of the participants did not have any idea of the mangrove problem before the workshop began. The country materials brought to the workshop by participants could also be integrated into the productions in some form giving an international dimension to their reports.

2. Journalists rarely get an opportunity to get feedback on their reports. For this reason, the feedback sessions with villagers and other workshop participants were very valuable. It was the experience of both the Nepal as well as the Malaysian workshop, however, that villagers are very reticent about expressing their views on the productions. Some thought needs to be given on ways to make the feedback more stimulating.

At this workshop, the participants were crammed into a small classroom
and almost 50 of the 65 villagers were school children. These circumstances were not very conducive to encouraging response. As the productions were presented one after another to the same group, a fatigue factor began to set in. In addition, the radio group made the mistake of outlining the objectives of the programme before the presentation thereby conditioning and discouraging response. The newspaper group was handicapped by the fact that its stories were not targeted at this village.

Ideally, the evaluation groups for the three productions should be different and the evaluation procedures should be discussed well in advance and well thought out. Appropriate questions and the feedback information needed should be well understood by each group.

3. The function of the feedback needs to be explained better to the participants as well. While several of them appreciated the value of the criticism to improve their productions, a few were overly defensive about their work. All participants need to recognise that the feedback is aimed not as criticism but as an opportunity to improve their productions and as a learning exercise.

4. The workshop provided an opportunity not only in reporting and writing news stories related to the environment, but also in production. Unlike broadcast journalists, several of who had production experience, all the print journalists were reporters. Few of them had any experience in layout and design and none had any experience in stripping.

As the electronic layout facility was unavailable at UKM because of technical difficulties, it forced members of the print group to undertake a production job they do not normally do. This was a valuable educational
experience and it enabled several in the print group to be exposed to desk top publishing for the first time. The production arrangements of all media, especially the print group, at future workshops need to be given special attention. So much of the energy of the workshop participants is spent on production that the message is not given enough opportunity for discussion. Production problems should therefore be minimised so that more time can be spent on the message. For the broadcasting groups this is especially important at the pre-production stage so that they can better shape their scripts before they start shooting.

5. The field visits with experts proved especially beneficial to the participants. The visits enabled theory to be integrated with actual events in the field. However, discussions on several subjects like air and chemical pollution, which were not the thrust of the workshop tended to blur its focus. While it is important that the participants get an overview of the pollution problems in a country, such an overview should be limited to no more than one to two sessions.

The panel discussion held at the beginning of the workshop is better held after the field visits. This is because it is problematic if panelists enter into a complicated debate disputing facts on the first day, as happened at the workshop. On the other hand, a panel discussion after the field visits will afford an opportunity to the participants to pose specific questions and get the benefit of more than one perspective on actual problems.

6. The sessions targeted to the specific problems being examined by the workshop should concentrate primarily on the sites being visited by the group. Background materials on pollution in Japan and other countries and even other regions of the country should be that -- background material. Some resource
persons gave very little information about pollution problems at the sites although their presentation was packed with data about other regions. Perhaps the workshop objectives should be better explained to the experts so that they focus on the topics.

7. Good journalism requires follow-up. Opportunities to gather additional information should therefore be provided. The print group sought out additional information from experts who were not brought to the workshop. This practice needs to be encouraged.

8. It would be desirable to add sessions on environment reporting at future workshops. This will enable some structured discussion of environment reporting problems as well as writing for a target audience, which currently are covered through practice during the productions. The sessions could cover "Sources of Information on the Environment," "Reporting for your Target Audience," "Simplifying Complex Information," "Overcoming Constraints on Environmental Reporting," etc.

These sessions should be of limited duration as the primary thrust of the workshop is practical experience. Nonetheless, the sessions could give new ideas to participants that they can experiment with during the productions. The workshop is especially challenging to the participants as it makes them realise that it is not enough merely to understand the problem, but to use the method and language in their media to reach their target audience. As none of their publications is targeted toward rural audiences this is novel for the participants and is best approached through structured training.
Klang River... 65,000kg of garbage emptied directly into it daily while another 120,000kg is buried in its vicinity.

KLANG RIVER
Its water can be used as insecticide

THE DEADLY SIDE OF KLANG RIVER

Its water can be used as insecticide

THE DEADLY SIDE OF KLANG RIVER

The article said the DOE estimated that 65,000kg of garbage were emptied directly into the river daily while 120,000kg of rubbish were buried and 200,000kg more burnt in the river's vicinity.

It quoted Dr Richard Lim of Universiti Malaya as saying the fifty that poured into the river included narcotics, human excrement and chemical wastes.

He had blamed industries, households, animal farms, mining and land development for the pollution.

The study revealed that four palm oil factories, 10 rubber processing factories and 902 industrial manufacturing installations were discharging chemical wastes into the river.

However, the study did not cover smaller industries and the gold-mining industry was not included.

Animal farms also dumped wastes into the river, and the DOE estimated that 34,455 pigs were raised near the river in 1984.

Upstream mines also contributed to the problem as the silt they discharged made the river shallower and more flood-prone, besides destroying marine life.

In the past, the Klang River was used agriculturally as it had the opening of land settlements.
KL river water 'so polluted it can be used as insecticide'

KUALA LUMPUR — Water from the Klang River, which flows through the heart of Kuala Lumpur, is so heavily polluted that it can be bottled and sold as insecticide, according to a study.

The study, carried out by the Department of Environment (DOE), concluded that the river was one of the 42 rivers in the country considered biologically dead. A report on the study was quoted in a newsletter produced by 30 journalists who attended a 12-day international seminar and workshop on the environment here.

The article said the DOE estimated that 65,000 kg of garbage were emptied directly into the river daily while 120,000 kg of rubbish were buried and 200,000 kg more burnt in the river's vicinity.

It quoted Dr Richard Lim of the University of Malaya as saying the filth that found its way into the river included rubbish, human excrement and chemical wastes. He had blamed industries, households, animal farms, mining and land development for the pollution.

The study revealed that four palm oil factories, 10 rubber-processing factories and 902 industrial manufacturing installations located along the river were discharging chemical wastes into it.

However, the study did not cover smaller industries and illegal "backyard" industries, the article said. Animal farms also dumped wastes into the river, and the DOE estimated that 34,455 pigs were raised near the river in 1984.

Upstream mines also contributed to the problem as the silt they discharged made the river shallower and more flood-prone, besides destroying marine life. — Bernama.

Brisk sales in baskets

IPOH — Malaysian handmade baskets are selling like "hot cakes" in Europe.

Disclosing this, Deputy National and Rural Development Minister Datuk Tajol Rosli Ghazali said Malaysia received orders for 100,000 baskets a month for the European market alone. — Bernama.
MP promises to look into plight of washed-out village

**FLASHBACK: Our report on Oct 26**

VILLAGERS in Bagan Pasir who live in fear that their homes may be washed away into the sea have been assured by the MP for Tanjung Karang, Datuk Kamaruzaman Ahmad, that he would look into their plight.

Datuk Kamaruzaman, who is attending the Parliament session in Kuala Lumpur, said he would visit the Bagan Pasir village on his return to the constituency to ascertain the magnitude of the problem and to take steps to overcome the problem.

Referring to a *New Straits Times* article on Monday which reported that the illegal harvesting of mangrove trees in the village had resulted in tidal erosion along the shoreline which threatens to bring down the wooden houses, he said:

"I was shocked to read about it. I will meet with the State Government to take all the necessary steps to ensure that proper measures are taken to halt the encroachment of the sea.

"I am also surprised that the residents of Bagan Pasir had not come to me with their problems. They should have briefed me so that I could have initiated certain measures earlier," he said.

The report said that at least three houses had collapsed since the beginning of this year as tidal erosion had softened the soil foundation in the area.

More details

This was attributed to the chopping down of the mangrove trees to sell by the villagers who were affected by poor catches at sea. This had resulted in the shoreline being stripped off this protective barrier.

Datuk Kamaruzaman said he will also hold a meeting with the district office to get more details on the steps being taken to overcome the soil erosion problem in Bagan Pasir.

He hoped that the headmen of these villages in Tanjung Karang would come forward and report to him of any activities that needed his attention so that he could take up the issue with the relevant authorities.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the Kuala Selangor district office said that the State Government had lined the shores in some areas with concrete blocks but this has been found to be effective only in certain stretches.

"In areas where the waves are stronger such as in Bagan Pasir, such remedial measures are only temporary as the concrete blocks are washed away by the tides."

"We are studying these areas in question and hope to come up with a solution soon," he said.

He added that the residents in these areas were also told to keep the district office informed of the situation on their shores to enable the office to monitor the effectiveness of the remedial work but many village heads had failed to do so.

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**Bird park in Taman Tasik Perdana**

KUALA LUMPUR: City Hall plans to set up a bird park in an eight-hectare area in Taman Tasik Perdana.

This is not only as an added aesthetic feature in the city but also to provide residents and visitors, especially tourists, with more recreational places of interest.

Datuk Bandar Datuk Elyas Omar said unlike the bird park in Singapore, the park here would be in a fenced area and have a netting canopy.

"We are studying the situation and hope to come up with a solution soon," he said.

Datuk Elyas said birds in the park would not be caged except for bigger species like eagles.

Various facilities would also be provided including a picnic spot for visitors.

City Hall, he added, had plans to build more parks in the city.
Village which sold out to the sea

When catches were poor, the fishermen of Bagan Pasir mortgaged their future for the sake of short-term survival. They cut down the mangrove forest which served as a sea-wall, protecting their homes from the encroaching tides. Now, they have cause to regret it, as our reporter K.P. Waran discovers...

TANJUNG KARANG: Villagers of Bagan Pasir, a coastal kampung in the Tanjung Karang area are worried for the safety of their homes. They fear their houses may be washed into the sea.

They have good reason to fear. The mangrove forest which once protected them from the incursion of the sea have disappeared, cut down by the village's illegal harvesters.

And now the sea is moving in.

Only a few weeks ago, a large wooden house near the shore collapsed. The erosion of its foundation was not noticed until it was too late.

Since the beginning of the year, these same causes have resulted in the collapse of at least three houses in Bagan Pasir area.

The villagers recall that over the last two decades, many of them have been forced to move inland as the shoreline was eroded by the waves.

According to early settlers, the area was once covered by mangrove forest. That was when the village had first begun to take shape.

The people of Bagan Pasir were mainly fishermen living off the sea which was then a three-kilometre area.

Since many lived on the banks of the river which joined the sea nearby, they also depended on fish harvesters to supplement their income.

According to Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman, 54, who has lived in Bagan Pasir all his life, some of the villagers realised the cash potential of the local mangrove trees in the area.

A time when catches were poor.

"There was a demand for mangrove wood. Before long both villagers and outsiders were indiscriminately chopping down the trees for the sake of a quick buck. One tree could fetch from five to 10 baht depending on demand.

"With continually poor catches at sea, many came to rely on illegal mangrove harvesting to supplement their income. Soon there were no more mangrove trees left. Then the waves began to eat away the land," he said.

For years the coastal mangrove forest had acted as a barrier to erosion, binding soil and mud together with their roots and preventing loss of land to the sea.

Protective barrier

When large areas of the shore were stripped of this protective barrier, heavy rain and constant tides combined to wash away the exposed surface of the shore, leaving only sections of unstable mud behind.

Now, a glance at the Bagan Pasir shoreline reveals only rising mangrove shoots. The earlier forest has been totally wiped out.

The wooden houses have been swept away by the waves.

Action has been taken by the fishing community and the State Government to stop the

massive erosion, but their combined measures seem to be effective in stopping the loss of land as was the original mangrove forest they have been able to do.

New concrete blocks line some stretches of the coastline to slow down inland while others large wooden beams have been driven into the ground to stop the wave.

These measures have provided only temporary relief. The continuous backing of the waves and the pull of the tides have displaced or washed away the pillars and damping beams.

The mangrove forest provided a natural protection for the coast. The villagers could build their homes near the water so that they could not be washed out to sea without trouble.

But now they have to build farther inland for fear of losing their homes. If action is done soon the sea may soon erode into the houses," said Emir Abdul Rashid.

He said that many are keeping an anxious eye on the mangrove shoots which grow along the coast and line the river banks. They now know how valuable these trees were to the village when they were still intact.

"If the mangrove shoots were also to be wiped out there would be no saying what would happen to the houses near the shore.

Belagor State Forestry Director S. Dinhong said enforcement officers are continuously patrolling the coast to catch culprits who were illegally harvesting mangrove trees.

"It is an offence to harvest these trees without a permit and those caught could be prosecuted. The Enforcement Division is working in three shifts to bring the culprits to book," he said.

However, he said it is too late. Where the forest had already been logged there was nothing the Forestry Department could do to take measures to ensure that the destruction is not
TIMES TWO

FISHERMEN AT END OF THE LINE?

Story and pictures by K.P. WABAN

TAKING TANGARUM: Before setting out to hook the small mangrove fish, a.Tangarum. The—...
Minutes of the Meeting of the
Country Representatives of COMCON, CDG & UNEP
held at Hotel Merlin
Kuala Lumpur, October 8, 1987

sent:
1. Eberhard Stotttele (CDG)
2. Kittisak Vachananabuthi (Thailand)
3. Domingo G. Abadilla (COMCON-Manila)
4. B. S. Ramaswigna (Sri Lanka)
5. Louie Tabing (Philippines)
6. Nupur Bhattacharya (Nepal)
7. Aujit Virojtrairatt (Thailand)

sent:
1. Santha Oorjitham (Malaysia)

Exchange of Information

It was agreed that country representatives will exchange information on environmental problems through COMCON-Manila. The initial period to be covered extends from November 15, 1987 to May 15, 1988.

Each representative shall send to COMCON-Manila a report by November 15, 1987 consisting of a radio tape of about five minutes and two articles, all in English and preferably written by COMCON members. Press clippings on environmental news may be included as well as a brief report of activities of each representative about COMCON. These reports will be reproduced by COMCON-Manila and distributed to corresponding representatives. Another report shall be exchanged in a similar manner on May 15, 1988.

To support this activity, a budget of $750.00 (US) was approved, to be charged against the balance from the $2,000.00 assistance from UNEP. Each representative shall receive $100.00 to cover costs of posting, transportation, etc. COMCON-Manila was allotted $250.00 for the six-month period.

At the end of the period November 15, 1987 to May 15, 1988, COMCON-Manila will produce a report containing press clippings and scripts of radio tapes that had been exchanged during the period. Copies of this report shall be distributed to country representatives, CDG and UNEP.

COMCON Circular

Once every two months from November 15, 1987, a circular describing COMCON activities shall be sent by COMCON-Manila to all participants of CDG-sponsored seminars for journalists in Asia to keep everyone posted on COMCON happenings. In this connection, Mr. Rahendra Sharma of Nepal was requested to write a
UNEPA Report

Mr. Kittisak will make a regular report on UNEP accomplishments relevant to COMCON. Expressing full support for COMCON, Mr. Kittisak said he stands behind the organization for which the COMCON representatives and UNEP expressed gratitude to him and Dr. Nay Htun.

Funding Support for COMCON

To stabilize and perpetuate the functions and activities of COMCON, a proposal as presented by Mr. Stottele and Mr. Abadilla for COMCON to seek funding from appropriate sources. Mr. Abadilla and Mr. Tabing will explore the possibility of gaining support from UNESCO through the UNESCO Commission in Manila. Mr. Stottele, or his part, will see if the German government can assist. A letter-proposal for this purpose has been prepared by Mr. Stottele and Mr. Abadilla.

Seminars After 1989

1. Mr. Stottele announced that CDG will hold two more training seminars for journalists, one in Papua New-Guinea and Indonesia in 1988, and the last one in Manila in 1989. This will complete the series of six CDG-sponsored workshops which started in Manila in 1984.

2. Should adequate funding support become available by 1988 or 1989, COMCON plans to take over the sponsorship of training seminars which will be dropped by CDG after 1989. This will be a big challenge and an excellent opportunity for COMCON.

Recorded by, Attested by,

Domingo C. Abadilla
Chairman COMCON

Eberhard Stottele
CDG

ATTENTION: The Singapore Copyright Act applies to the use of this document.
I. Nature of Organization.

COMCON, INC. is an organization of active media practitioners who have committed themselves to promoting public consciousness in the conservation and proper utilization of the gifts of nature.

Each member is heavily involved in a special manner to devoting time, space, talent and efforts in promoting a healthier environment. He may be involved in one or several media such as radio/television, newspapers, magazines, comics, cinema and other forms of mass media, either as front liners or decision makers.

The organization is to be registered and shall seek recognition from government and non-government organizations both on the local and regional levels.

While initially COMCON will concentrate on membership campaign in the ASIA-PACIFIC region, it hopes to generate interest among other media practitioners all around the globe.

Established organizations which will show interest in the cause of better environment and in working with COMCON are to be considered for affiliation.

II. Rationale and Objectives.

Conservation of nature and wise utilization of biological resources are the primary concerns of COMCON.

Today, in all countries of Asia-Pacific and throughout the world, the need for arousing public awareness on environment issues has become a prerequisite in man's survival.

Media constitute a significant force in molding the minds of the citizens and decision makers as well. Positive information, motivation, and attitudinal changes could be effected largely through media.

However, media people in general, either through lack of motivation or information themselves, have not sufficiently responded to the call for organized campaigns in environment protection. Hence, COMCON aims to:

1. Involve/motivate a wider number of media practitioners in providing more time, talent, space, materials in environment campaigns in a programmed, coordinated and concentrated manner.

2. Get active media campaigners to coordinate their campaigns with other media people and environmental citizens' organizations.

3. Educate and train media men in more effective use of their tools.

4. Evolve and implement coordinated strategies for wider, massive and sustained media campaigns.

5. Provide an opportunity for exchange of materials, experiences and better media campaigns both on individual and organizational levels.

6. Seek and implement unified direction in media campaign.

7. Distribute responsibilities and jobs among campaigners depending on capabilities.

COMCON in a nutshell is an instrument for conducting effective nation campaigns and developing more effective media practitioners in the field of environmental conservation.
III. Projects and Activities of COMCON.

1. Initially, COMCON will set up a regional secretariat that will serve as its nerve center. The secretariat shall handle administrative matters of the organization and undertake research and production materials. The secretariat will serve also as a coordinating and resource generation office.

National and local secretariats shall be organized when necessary as resources become available.

2. Through the secretariat, national and regional meetings will be organized to discuss problems and opportunities in effecting campaigns.

3. Seminars and workshops shall be conducted among members and other people involved in order to make COMCON most effective. Seminar-workshops will take up improvement of the use of media, improvement in the knowledge level of media practitioners in the environment issues, and determining effective formats, styles, and strategies in the campaign. One-day to fifteen-day seminars will be preferred depending on the topic, funding and other requirements. These seminar-workshops can involve local, national or international participation.

Seminars like these provide opportunity for organizing local units and groups of COMCON.

4. The Secretariat and the organization will institute an awards and incentives system for outstanding practitioners and participants in the campaign at the local and regional level. Model members and media men shall be chosen and given certificates, plaques, equipment, financial support, scholarship grants, and other forms of recognition.

Members shall be provided identification cards, pins, stickers and other forms of distinction.

IV. Information Exchange Mechanism.

1. A production unit in the Secretariat shall take charge of gathering special materials that will be useful to media practitioners as well as NGOs (non-government organization). These materials will be multiplied, and prepared in the most usable format for the members:

a. For distribution, broadcast materials on tape will be produced, including interviews with authorities, plugs (spots), and jingles.

b. Technical research results shall be popularized and transmitted to members. When possible, original materials shall be duplicated and sent to members.

c. Photographs and other materials will be syndicated.

d. A newsletter that contains newsbits about the organization shall be prepared on a monthly basis. The newsletter shall contain news and information about COMCON and the environment as well as potential media materials, and some guidelines on the use of media. Articles from members shall be solicited.

e. TV spots, slide presentations and documentary shall be produced by the production unit.

f. Exchange of materials will be initiated and coordinated by the production unit.

2. A research unit shall gather and collate materials for researches. It will put up its own library for use by the production unit as well as the members seeking information assistance.
CONCOM will coordinate with research agencies, and institutions for materials on environment such as schools, UNDP, national government agencies, and private institutions involved in ecology. A computer set-up may be necessary in maintaining a data bank.

3. The organization shall put up synchronized media campaigns on the national and regional levels. Through broadcast programs, newspapers, magazines, COMCON shall encourage citizens' movements dedicated to environment protection. It shall support existing institutions that are supportive of the cause of environment protection. It shall establish linkages with government and non-government drives.

Some basic support COMCON can give citizens' movements include publicity, educational support, communication motivation among members as well as linking with institutions, and agencies.

4. A secretariat research unit will set up evaluation schemes to determine effectiveness of media approaches and strategies. It will also undertake studies on people's attitudes, information level, and other relevant information.

V. Organizational Structure.

CONCON shall choose regional and national leaders who will provide direction and leadership in the organization.

A country delegation or a local chapter shall be named to constitute the secretariat. The secretariat shall have a Secretary-General who will be considered as the over-all leader of the organization.

The Secretariat shall be manned by professionals in administration, media production, and the technical field. Its office shall be set up initially in a capital city such as Manila or Bangkok and administratively handled by an officer of the organization.

An Executive Director shall run the administrative function of the Secretariat.

Each country shall have a national media chairman. Each local chapter chairman.

The Secretary and Treasurer should come from the same country as the Secretary-General for closer coordination.

The general membership shall meet once every two years for the purpose of electing its officers and to adopt future plans and programs.

Membership campaign shall be done through the charter members of the organization. Each member shall nominate prospective members in his own country chosen from among the most effective practitioners, with willingness and inclination to participate in a wider scope. A certain exclusivity shall be instituted even as the membership shall be open to as many members as possible. Only those with good standing and track record shall be considered for acceptance by a special membership committee.

Kinds of Members:

1. Charter Member - Those are the founding members who, in addition to one of several mass media and are committed to promoting conservation of nature and biological resources.

2. Regular Member - Media practitioners who, for political or economic reasons public awareness of environment issues through their respective media outlets.

3. Corporate Member - Organizations which have interest in the cause of better environment.
COMCON ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Executive Committee

Secretary-General

Consultants

Country Secretariat

National Chairman

Secretary

Executive Director

Treasurer

Finance and Admin. Staff

Research Staff

Production Staff
PAPERS PRESENTED AT WORKSHOP

1. THE KLANG RIVER ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS: AN OVERVIEW
   by Maketab Mohamed
   (35 Pages)

2. MANGROVES AND MARINE LIFE
   by A. Sasekumar
   (17 Pages)

3. CHEMICALS ASPECTS OF AIR POLLUTION
   by M. Ahmad Badri
   (28 Pages)

4. MARINE POLLUTION AND COASTAL RESOURCES SENSITIVITY INDEX
   by Nasiman Sapari
   (7 Pages)

5. POST-MERDEKA DEVELOPMENT AND AIR QUALITY DEGRADATION IN MALAYSIA
   by Sham Sani and Jamaluddin Jahi
   (27 Pages)

6. THE EFFECTS OF POLLUTION ON FRESHWATER RESOURCES
   by R. P. Lim
   (30 Pages)

7. SOME ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN MALAYSIA AND ACTIONS BY GOVERNMENT
   by Ir. Goh Kiam Seng
   (13 Pages)

8. FORESTRY AND POLLUTION
   by Francis Ng
   (4 Pages)

9. FUTURE INTER-RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNOLOGY - A DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE
   by Manogaran Maniam
   (4 Pages)

10. ECOLOGICAL AND BIOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE TROPICAL RAINFOREST ECOSYSTEM
    by Tho Yow Pong
    (14 Pages)
By Alan C. Robles

A river is usually a source of life and sustenance to people living along its shores.

But to Sawiah Tupoh, a 49-year-old housewife in Kampung Sementa, Bagan Pasir, there were about 100 fishermen. Now only 20 rely on fishing for their livelihood.

The Forestry Department, says the erosion was caused by villagers who had cut the mangrove trees for firewood or other purposes. A dam was built along the beach to prevent coral erosion, but it caused the river to become shallow and narrow.

The villagers realise the link between mangrove forests and marine life. "It was easy to catch fish and prawns earlier, heavy rains deluged the village and sent floodwaters tower one metre high. During partial rains, the fish like to eat. That's why they come here," Jalil says.

The mangrove swamp is a place where fish like to play and feed. Mangrove trees that fall into the swamp are covered by teritip. A kind of barnacle which the fish like to eat. That's why they come here.

The uncontrolled dumping may lead to the eventual destruction of Gombak's marine life. There are more than 300 species of freshwater fish in Malaysia, but only 27 of them are known to live in the Gombak River. The reason for the scarcity of fish species in the Gombak lies largely in the high levels of pollution. In the river is a faint memory.

As Buttsworth developed, factories sprouted, and chemical effluents from factories mixed with domestic wastes, chemicals, and animal excrement and agricultural runoff. The resulting pollution destroyed all marine life in the river. The fish species that managed to survive are unfit for human consumption.
One World
Conservation Needs Public Participation

F 133 great areas thirteen times the size of Singapore are cleared annually in Malaysia, underscoring the gravity of the environmental problems facing the country because of indiscriminate felling of trees. During the past 100 years, more than 40 percent of the earth’s belt has fallen prey to mankind’s need for food, shelter and fuel.

According to an estimate by the Food and Agricultural Organisation, tropical rain forests about the size of Sri Lanka are lost annually worldwide — that is a “football field every time you snap your fingers,” says Paul Wachtel of the World Wildlife Fund. Nearly 0.6 percent of tropical closed forests in Asia is destroyed every year. Half of Thailand’s forest reserves have been destroyed in the past 25 years.

Malaysia too has lost half of its loggable forests, and 825,000 hectares more are cleared annually. Forty-two percent of the country’s rivers have been declared “dead,” incapable of supporting marine life because of pollution. Nearly one-third of the mangrove coastal area in Kuala Selangor has been eroded.

What has contributed to this dismal situation? Human activities are fundamentally responsible. A report entitled ‘Our Common Future’ by the World Commission on Environment and Development published recently says, “Today, the scale of our interventions in nature is increasing and the physical effects of our decisions will spill across national frontiers.”

Decreased population pressures, poverty, illiteracy, rapid industrialisation and stepped up developmental activities constantly exert pressure on the natural resources and disturb the ecological cycle. Malaysia is fortunate in that it does not face the heavy population pressures of other Asian countries. Nonetheless, acute environmental problems exist.

Yet, most people seem totally oblivious to the problems. What is therefore needed is an urgent and global environmental consciousness campaign to make people aware of the consequences of pollution upon their lives and to get them involved in programmes designed to alleviate the problems.

As Joseph Ouma, Dean of the School of Environmental Studies, Monash University, says, “The environment is the business of everybody. I think the solution will be found in encouraging mass environmental literacy so that they can be democratic and literate decisions, because if decisions are taken by a few without the incorporation of the opinion of the masses, the NGOs (non governmental organisations) especially included, the likelihood is that the solutions will not succeed. They will be imposed from above, the people will not respond positively to them, and the project is lost before it is launched.”

Hopefully peoples and governments the world over will take heed and begin a partnership to preserve the environment for our future generations.

ACTION LINE

In a bid to clarify concerns voiced by several people, One World correspondent Ajantha Ranasinghe quizzed Dr. Goh Kiam Seng, acting director general of the Department of Environment.

Q: What is being done to stop palm oil factories from polluting rivers in Malaysia?
A: Palm oil factories are strictly controlled. We monitor about 200 mills and a very small percentage of their waste affects the environment and that too is controlled by responsible officers. The same applies to rubber factories.

Q: I request the public to bring to our notice any instances of rubber or palm oil mills damaging the environment. The public can report to us directly and we will act under the law.

Q: Since people are using tap water, they are unaffected and unconcerned about the pollution problem. Do you intend to leave polluted rivers as they are?
A: We are planning to reclaim these rivers for the benefit of the young generations. The task cannot be done overnight.

Q: Are you taking any measures to stop pollution of rivers?
A: Rivers are being reclaimed in various countries such as the United Kingdom, Singapore and so on. Protecting the environment means not only cleaning the rivers. Mon ey has to be put into such projects. The government has provided tap water to people as an alternative to the problem.

Q: Illegal pig farms in certain areas cause environmental problems in Malaysia. As they are illegal they are not bound by any rules and regulations. What precautions is EPA taking on this matter?
A: The veterinary department is closely monitoring their activities as it is the duty of the public to bring to the notice of the authorities if there is destruction of the environment due to these farms and then we will react immediately.

Q: An engineer in Kumpung Bagan Pasir has conducted a successful educational campaign among the villagers on the importance of mangroves. Could you tell us how his example in other areas similarly threatened?
A: This campaign was not done by our department on our own initiative. But we are glad to hear about a such successful operation. We are undoubtedly prepared to join hands with any individual or institute in any campaign to protect the environment.

Q: Is your department focusing the same attention on environmental problems in other towns as it is in Kuala Lumpur?
A: Well, we are on the move and we have the machinery. We have the plans and we are getting cooperation and assistance.
HUTAN PAYA BAKAU MUSNAH
Nelayan Hilang Pekerjaan

Oleh Karim Sulaiman

NELAYAN beberapa kawasan di Tanjung Karang, Kapar dan Sungai Klang mengungkapkan mereka terpaksa menangkap ikan semakin berkurangan.


Tetapi sekarang kawasan ini menjadi kawasan rekreasi untuk ia menebar racun serangga. "Kalau diberikan kepada mangrove, ia akan tumbuh dengan baik," kata Encik Mohamed, 31, ada kira-kira 100 nelayan seputih taman lalu.

Pendapat begini jelas menunjukkan betapa rendahnya tingkat kenyamanan mereka terhadap sungai utama yang mengalir di tengah-tengah kota Kuala Lumpur.

"Kalau mengena dengan tempat untuk kegiatan rekreasi, sungai utama bukan lagi dikehendaki." Dikatakan Encik Mohamed besok akan sedang bertamu ke pulau di dekat Kapar.


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Keluh Seorang Nelayan Tua

Oleh Zaharudin


Ayah ialah seorang penebang kayu. Ia dikenang banyak dalam setiap pagi dan petang, belajar berenang bersamaan sungai yang jarang yang dapat membangunkan. Dan sar atau pada masa bulan sama-sama dengan Pak Dollah. Wak Kassim dan hasil tangkapan ikan sebagaimana zaman ayah untuk bekerja kuat.

Oleh Zaharudin

Pencemaran: Orang Asli

Pegawai Perubatan di Hospital Orang Asli Gombak, Dr. K. Selvarajan katanya datami pelan barata, ikan sungai Gombak sudah tidak selamat lagi untuk diminum.

Karanya, siasapa yang minum ikan sungai Gombak sanyan mudah dijangkiti penyakit, termasuk tin susu, sisa terganggu pencernaan. Ia dikenang banyak dalam setiap pagi dan petang, belajar berenang bersamaan sungai yang jarang yang dapat membangunkan. Dan sar atau pada masa bulan sama-sama dengan Pak Dollah. Wak Kassim dan hasil tangkapan ikan sebagaimana zaman ayah untuk bekerja kuat.

Oleh Zaharudin

Pencemaran: Orang Asli

Villagers driven from homes by destruction of mangroves

By C Boonpharod

Driving his blue motorcycle along the coastline of Bagan Pasir, a tiny village in the state of Selangor, Cham Hang-Sing, a Chinese fisherman, passes the muddy beach where his home once stood.

His first home really. For Cham has moved thrice since he was born in 1956.

Each time he was forced back because the sea gnaed away at the coastline. Cham was born to a fisherman family. Near 30 years ago the muddy beach in his village was a wet mangrove forest, the land dense with trees and bushes.

At the time, only 20 houses were located in Bagan, and mined the population were fishermen.

Usually, they didn't pay much attention to the mangrove forest, but when life got tougher they supplemented their income by cutting the trees to sell for fuel and building materials.

Then there were floods, the soil crumbled, and most of the villagers were pushed inland.

"There were huge tidal waves from the sea," Cham recalls.

"I don't know what caused the soil erosion, maybe nature did that."

He says he was three years old the first time his family moved house; 15 years the second time and 18 years the third.

His house now stands about one kilometre from the spot where his first home stood.

Bagan Tanjung Karang's human is 54-year-old Sheau Meng. He was six when his family came from China and settled in the area.

At that time, 44 years ago, Sheau's village was surrounded by mangrove swamps. Then the state government in the area reclaimed the land, giving four acres to each family for cultivation and house construction, and the villagers cut down the mangrove trees to use the land.

Markets also logged the area after securing licenoses from the state. A mangrove tree fetches about MYR 1,000, one reason why the mangrove forests in Kuala Selangor are endangered. Already 40 per cent of the total mangrove forests in the state have been destroyed.

According to Associate Professor Dr. A. Sasekumar of Malaysian zoology department, the main cause of land erosion in Selangor is the loss of mangrove forests.

He explains that the roots of the trees hold the soil and mud together, preventing the land from crumbling. The roots also keep the soil fluffy like a sponge enabling it to absorb large volumes of water.

When the mangrove forests are cleared, the soil becomes dense and loses the ability to hold water.

Environmental apathy criticized

By Romy Tangbawan

Public apathy is impeding Malaysia's environmental protection efforts, according to the Environmental Protection Society of Malaysia (EPSM) and the Department of Environment (DOE).

EPSM president Gurmit Singh says that without active public participation, pollution problems cannot be solved.

Singh attributes the public apathy to the government's "regressive policies" against dissenters.

Pollution problems cannot be solved without the participation of the people.

"The people are afraid to come forward and speak up for fear of being charged with anti-government sentiments under the Internal Security Act (ISA)," he charges.

This is the reason why mass media shy away from publicizing serious environmental issues.

He cites the struggle of tribal people in a Sarawak town against the construction of the Bakun Hydroelectric dam which was ignored by the mass media "except by one newspaper which produced a story based on distorted facts to discredit opposition to the dam."

Acting DOE director-general Mohamad Khir Adnan also concedes that without public support and cooperation, the government cannot push its pollution and environmental management programmes effectively. However he denies Singh's allegations, saying the government is instead encouraging the people to open up air their grievances and give suggestions.

"If they think something's wrong, they should come forward to concerned agencies. They are not sincere if they use environmental issues to hit the government for political reasons, rather than suggesting that should be done," he says.

He agrees that efforts to create consciousness about environmental issues among the public are needed to be intensified.

Governor bows to villagers' protests over dam project

The Selangor State Government and the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) have come together to establish a nature park in Kuala Selangor to protect the natural habitat of several wildlife species, including very rare ones.

Officially opened on September 27, 1987, the 260 hectare park is the first to be initiated by a non-governmental agency and is illustrative of current participation in environmental matters. The MNS is currently managing mangrove destruction.

Although a man-made cement beach is an eye sore, villagers prefer it to land erosion and floods.

Since the 1980s the government has been conducting an educational programme on mangroves.

According to Othman, although many villagers have been cutting mangrove trees, the government has not pressed them into department has attempted to educate the villagers.

"Education is more enduring and effective," he asserts, adding that "people are aware now that mangrove is important."

Sheau confirms: "I know they'll be killed, but we're together and prevent erosion. All my people know."

A protection against coastal erosion brought about by the government during rainfall can lead to floods, says Sasekumar.

When Bagan Pasir's mangroves were destroyed, the villagers suffered from flooding and land erosion. The last serious flood in 1980 destroyed soil palm plantations in the area.

Othman, district engineer in Kuala Selangor's drainage and irrigation department, claims the destruction of mangroves in the area has now been halted.

The land erosion along Kuala Selangor's coastline has also been stopped and the state government has taken steps to contain further damage by placing fences or concrete blocks on the beaches.
Plans to save mangroves

An international expert group has proposed sweeping guidelines to conserve the nation's rapidly disappearing mangrove forests in the face of their large-scale conversion into aquaculture ponds.

The guidelines include specific criteria for the location of aquaculture ponds, their size, design and construction. Dr. Pak Ahim Stephen Yong, minister of science, technology and environment, says the guidelines would preserve the fishing ecosystem and mangrove forests through a "conservation plan."

It is necessary to take immediate action to protect the remaining mangrove forests. Mangrove forests are being rapidly disappearing mangrove areas.

Landward sides of mangrove forests where fishing output is poor and where the impact on coastal fisheries is minimal. Mangrove areas already reclaimed for agricultural purposes and unused or abandoned areas.

Mangrove reserves that are not managed on a sustained basis for farming and fishing.

The group also recommends that ponds be constructed with minimum excavations to avoid problems associated with acid sulphate soils. It also suggests the use of pumped water supplies and the use of pellet feed instead of raw trash fish in the ponds.

The three-year study conducted by the University of Malaya's Dr. Richard Peter Lim of Earth Sciences, says that this suggests that coastal fisheries are highly dependent on mangrove ecosystems.

This is ironic because mangroves are often despoiled to make room for aquaculture ponds and fishing. The Working Group on Mangrove was formed in early 1987, and included representatives from both governmental and foreign institutions.

Their proposals now await governmental action.

Mangroves no wasteland

A mangrove swamp may look like a wasteland to people, but its ecosystem, says that this suggests that coastal fisheries are highly dependent on mangrove ecosystems.

Mangrove reserves that are not managed on a sustained basis for farming and fishing.

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Klang: Malaysia's biggest sewer

The Klang River is so heavily polluted that some environmentalists say that its water can be bottled and sold as is. The Klang is perhaps Malaysia's biggest sewer.

Dr. Richard Peter Lim of Earth Sciences, says that this suggests that coastal fisheries are highly dependent on mangrove ecosystems.

This is ironic because mangroves are often despoiled to make room for aquaculture ponds and fishing. The Working Group on Mangrove was formed in early 1987, and included representatives from both governmental and foreign institutions.

Their proposals now await governmental action.

Environment education

The Malaysian government is running campaigns to promote environmental consciousness among the people. According to Dr. Goh Kian Seng, acting director general of the Department of Environment (DOE), the objective is to make people appreciate the value of nature.

With this objective, the DOE conducts lectures for the general public, and has introduced environment courses in schools.

"We conduct lectures mainly to give an idea about future problems of nature. We have already introduced a subject called 'Man and his Environment' for fourth, fifth and sixth graders, and intend to extend this to the lower levels," Goh said.

He added that to mark World Environment Day, the DOE conducted art, literature and tree planting competitions among students and elders, and in Selangor State, the department runs special programmes for three months each year.

The educational drive includes television and radio broadcasts and posters. In addition, the DOE is experimenting with an educational project to promote participation by the people. This is done by using specially printed materials that people can fill to voice environment-related complaints.

"We have tried it successfully with civil servants and we hope to use it on the general public in the near future," Goh said.

He asserts that the educational campaigns have made the people more aware of environmental issues, and some have even taken their environment complaints to the Prime Minister. 