

## Malaysia:

# After the Malacca Water Crisis

After the Malacca water crisis there can be no denying the fact that our lives, even as urban dwellers, are inextricably linked to the delicate balance of nature. Mismanagement and incompetence aside, the drying up of the Durian Tunggal dam is partly due to maldevelopment practices. These have led to the reduction of forest reserves which were water catchment areas in Malacca and are from where this water crisis stems.

Besides the obvious hardship that has been experienced by all those involved in this environmental crisis, there have also been reports of increases in stress-related health problems. As a women's group, All Women's Action Society (AWAM) is gravely concerned with the reports in the Malay Mail (19/3/1991) about a 400% leap in the rate of miscarriages among women in the crisis-stricken area. The report quotes one gynecologist who claims to be handling up to 14 cases a week as compared to one a week prior to the water crisis. It is clear that the added task of fetching water daily coupled with the emotional stress of uncertainty over water supplies have contributed to this alarming increase in miscarriages.

This water crisis makes even clearer that the imbalance which is being created in our environment to-

day is an issue that concerns women. As the primary carers of family well-being, women should be especially concerned that our living environment is sustainably managed and preserved for the continued coexistence of our future generations.

There are lessons to be learnt from this water crisis, the most important being that all development schemes need to be weighed by the effect that they will have on the environment and our future generations. The development of the Sungai Buloh Forest Reserve by the Selangor State Development Corporation (NST City Extra, 21-22 March 1991) is shocking in view of the crisis being experienced in Malacca. Interestingly, the development plan was rejected by the Department of Environment (DOE) based on the environment impact assessment (EIA).

The Sungai Buloh Forest Reserve is the last forest reserve in the Klang Valley and acts as the major "green lung" for our increasingly polluted city air. It also is the upper catchment area for three river systems that feed the Sungai Damansara and it is an important drinking water source for residents of Sungai Buloh. The government is banking its hopes on a pipeline from the Muar River (The Star, 21/3/1991, p. 3) to solve the

water crisis, an option that we might not have in Selangor if we so flagrantly ignore the necessity to preserve our river systems.

Women in Sabah and Sarawak are finding it hard to obtain clean drinking water for their families as their river systems become heavily silted due to indiscriminate logging practices there. If we did not understand the severe deterioration of quality of life for people in Sabah and Sarawak due to maldevelopment before, it should be apparent to us now. All of us stand to suffer if we do not respect our coexistent relationship with the environment.

The only kind of development that is sustainable for us is that which preserves the quality of our lives and our environments - simple things like clean water, fresh air, and healthy communities, not the kind that enumerates human wellbeing in terms of numbers of skyscrapers and stock market prices.

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