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Take pride in our landscapes

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IN 1995 Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wrote a little paper entitled Landscaping the Nation.

It is sad that we had to be goaded to clean up the mess in our backyards and beautify our surroundings.

Cleanliness matters. Beauty, especially of the natural environment, matters.

Harmony in sight and sound matters.

If we find it difficult to appreciate the positive heritage of colonialism, we should at least acknowledge that the British had created the Botanical Gardens and the Lake Gardens, among others.

The British were also responsible for establishing the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia, the beautiful tree-lined streets and avenues in Penang and Taiping.

Landscaping the Nation gives invaluable pointers:

- * Plant (well-spaced out) trees on either side of all roads and major highways.

- * They must be in line, following the curve of the road gracefully and not some closer to the road and others further. To get a graceful curve it may be necessary for some to be away from the edge of the road.

- * Only one species (of trees should be planted) for each road, at least for 20 kilometre stretches.

- * Keep tree trunks straight by means of buttress poles.

- * Trees must be checked at regular intervals, frequently when young.

- * Road reserves should provide sufficient space for tree planting.

- * Where soil is not fertile, use fertilizers.

- * Plant (well-spaced out) trees along river banks as well. Follow the course of the river, keeping graceful curves.

- * Leave mangrove swamps alone. Nipah swamps on river banks are not to be disturbed.

- * Where there are swamps, grow trees which attract fireflies.

- * Owners of good homes facing rivers should be allowed to build boat landings if they undertake to look after the river reserve in front of their houses.

- * Weeping willows should be grown on river banks for decoration.

To ensure the success of our landscaping efforts, it was suggested that a department headed by a senior officer should oversee all tree-planting measures. While local authorities should provide the labour, Federal funds should be allocated for these projects.

The private sector should be invited to be active sponsors of the efforts to landscape the nation.

Trees are (often) planted very near the (edge of) roads as if the planners and planters do not realise or do not have the foresight to see that such roads may later be expanded.

Such is the attitude of frontiersmen, carpetbaggers and mavericks who fail to see the need for prudence and planning in tree planting. They do not seem to appreciate the interdependence of Man and Nature. No thought is given to the rights of future generations to enjoy such natural beauty.

While some developers disregard the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment, there are others who care enough for the environment to take conservation measures.

We must nurture the love of nature among the young and old for they are

the stewards, the vicegerents of the earth. Their responsibility and conscience must not be limited to the care of fellow humans but must be more encompassing, caring for all of God's creations.

In Penang, for instance, the Baobab tree indigenous to sub-Saharan Africa which can live over 1,000 years and can grow up to 25 metres, is well preserved. In the Bukit Nanas area in Kuala Lumpur, a 100-year-old Jelutong tree (*Dyera Costulata*) is preserved.

Each little village and township must have its own vision of conservation, beauty and development. Such a vision would mobilise people to create more gardens and lakes in our cities and States. Such visions of beauty would awaken our artistic impulses.

Chinese and Japanese gardens have their own unique designs. The Malay village is in fact (surrounded by) a garden with its natural beauty. As we draw inspiration from the indigenous, we should engage in the creation of the Malaysian garden.

How fabulous it would be to have tree-lined river banks throughout the country like those in Kuching and Kuantan.

Beyond the need for landscaping, there is something spiritual and therapeutic about caring for the environment, whether of trees or other life forms.

Ultimately, caring for one's own little garden, whether outdoors or indoors is one's own responsibility.

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