



FRIDAY, APRIL 16, 1976

DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

TREE PLANTING FOR A BETTER ENVIRONMENT

OVER ONE-SEVENTH OF HONG KONG'S FORESTRY PLANTATIONS WAS AFFECTED BY HILL FIRES IN THE LAST DRY SEASON.

TO REPLANT THE 483,000 TREES DAMAGED, MORE THAN \$2.4 MILLION FROM PUBLIC FUNDS WOULD BE NEEDED FOR TREE SEEDLINGS, LABOUR AND FERTILISERS, NOT COUNTING THE SUBSEQUENT COSTS OF TENDING THE YOUNG TREES TILL THEY ARE TALL ENOUGH TO PROVIDE SHELTER AND EFFECTIVE COVER FOR THE SOIL.

IF ONLY THOSE PEOPLE, PROBABLY PICNICKERS AND VILLAGERS WHO CAUSED THE 116 FORESTRY FIRES LAST WINTER HAD KNOWN HOW LONG IT TAKES TO NURSE THE TREE SEEDLINGS AND HOW PATIENTLY FORESTRY STAFF OF THE AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES DEPARTMENT CARED FOR THE GROWING TREES, THEY WOULD HAVE SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT THROWING AWAY LIGHTED CIGARETTE ENDS, BUILDING BARBECUE FIRES IN NON-PERMITTED AREAS, OR USING FIRE IN CLEARING THEIR LAND.

+PREPARATIONS FOR THE PLANTING ON THE HILLS START EARLY IN JANUARY EVERY YEAR,+ THE DEPARTMENT'S FORESTRY OFFICER, MR. K.C. IU, SAID.

+FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, WORKERS, TRUDGING OVER THE PLANTATIONS WITH THEIR PICKS AND SPADES, DIG EVENLY SPACED PITS FOR THE SEEDLINGS TO BE PLANTED LATER.+

+BECAUSE OF THE HARDNESS OF THE SOIL AND THE TERRAIN, EACH OF THEM CAN DIG ONLY ABOUT THIRTY OR FORTY PITS EACH WORKING DAY.+

+THEN, TOWARDS THE END OF APRIL, THEY WAIT FOR THE RAIN. MAKING USE OF THE OPPORTUNITY IMMEDIATELY AFTER A DOWNPOUR OR BEFORE AN EXPECTED SHOWER, THE WORKERS START OUT AGAIN TO PUT THE SEEDLINGS IN PLACE IN THE PITS ALREADY DUG THERE. IT IS IMPRACTICABLE TO WATER LARGE STRETCHES OF GROUND UP IN THE HILLS. PLANTING DEPENDS VERY MUCH UPON THE WEATHER,+ MR. IU ADDED.

BECAUSE OF THE BARREN NATURE OF MOST OF HONG KONG'S SOIL, FERTILISERS ARE APPLIED AT THE TIME OF PLANTING. A SECOND APPLICATION OF FERTILISER IS USED AT THE END OF THE RAINS AND A THIRD THE FOLLOWING YEAR.

+YET EVEN BEFORE THE PITS ARE DUG, MORE FUNDAMENTAL WORK HAS TO BE DONE SOME TEN MONTHS EARLIER,+ MR. IU CONTINUED,+THE PLANTING STOCK OF SEEDLINGS HAS TO BE RAISED IN THE FORESTRY NURSERY+.

IN A TWENTY-SEVEN-ACRE EXPERIMENTAL FARM TUCKED AWAY AT TAI LUNG, SHEUNG SHUI, THE DEPARTMENT MANAGES A FOREST NURSERY WHICH PRODUCES APPROXIMATELY 500,000 SEEDLINGS AND SAPLINGS EVERY YEAR.

/+EXCEPT

+EXCEPT FOR THE SAPLINGS, WHICH ARE MOSTLY FOR PLANTING IN COUNTRYSIDE PICNIC AREAS AND FOR SUPPLY TO VILLAGERS, SCHOOLS AND THE HIGHWAYS OFFICE FOR AMENITY PLANTING, NEARLY ALL THE YOUNG PLANTS NURTURED THERE WILL EVENTUALLY BE PLANTED OUT IN THE TEN FORESTRY PLANTATIONS ON THE NEW TERRITORIES MAINLAND,+ MR. IU SAID.

+FORESTRY AREAS ON LANTAU ISLAND - IN CHI MA WAN, SHEK PIK AND NAM SHAN NEAR SILVER MINE BAY AND ON HONG KONG ISLAND, BY THE SIDES OF TAI TAM RESERVOIR, RECEIVE THEIR STOCKS OF TREE SEEDLINGS FROM TWO SMALLER NURSERIES, IN WONG NEI CHUNG AND NAM SHAN+.

THE CENTRAL NURSERY AT TAI LUNG FARM IS ORGANISED IN FOUR SECTIONS - A SOWING AREA WITH ROWS OF SEED BEDS, A TUBING AREA WHERE INDIVIDUAL SEEDLINGS ARE TRANSPLANTED TO TUBULAR BAGS OF COMPOST AND EARTH, A LARGE SEEDLINGS NURSING AREA WHERE THE TUBED PLANTS ARE TENDED FOR SOME EIGHT TO TEN MONTHS, AND A SAPLING NURSING AREA WHERE THE YOUNG TREES ARE FURTHER TENDED FOR ABOUT TWO YEARS BY WHICH TIME THEY REACH ALMOST TEN FEET IN HEIGHT AND ARE SUITABLE FOR AMENITY WORK.

THE MOST PREFERRED SPECIES FOR AFFORESTATION AT PRESENT ARE THE ACACIA AND TRISTANIA. THE ACACIA IS EVERGREEN, GROWS FAST, FORMS EFFECTIVE WINDBREAKS, CAN SURVIVE ON POOR SOIL AND WILL PRODUCE NEW GROWTH EVEN AFTER DAMAGE BY FIRE. THE TRISTANIA, ORIGINATING FROM AUSTRALIA, HAS THE SAME VIRTUE OF REGROWTH AFTER A FIRE. THE AMERICAN SLASH PINE HAS A STRAIGHT TRUNK AND IS COMPARATIVELY LESS FIRE-TENDER THAN THE LOCAL PINE, AND IS ALSO PLANTED, ALTHOUGH NOT IN AS LARGE NUMBERS AS PREVIOUSLY. THE LOCAL PINE, FORMERLY WIDELY PLANTED ALL OVER HONG KONG, IS NO LONGER PLANTED ON ANY SCALE BECAUSE IT IS HIGHLY SUSCEPTIBLE TO FIRE DAMAGE.

+AT ONE TIME, AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, THE LOCAL PINE WAS AN IMPORTANT REVENUE-EARNER,+ MR. IU SAID,+IT IS ON RECORD THAT IN 1903 THERE WERE 5,000 ACRES OF PLANTATION ON HONG KONG ISLAND ITSELF AND IN 1904, TIMBER FROM THE FELLING OF MATURE TREES EARNED SOME \$18,000 - A VERY LARGE SUM IN THOSE DAYS+.

+DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, HONG KONG'S TREES WERE RAMPANTLY PILLAGED FOR FUEL. IN ORDER TO REPLANT LARGE AREAS IN A SHORT TIME GREAT QUANTITIES OF PINE SEEDS WERE BROADCAST OVER THE BARE HILLSIDES.

+COMPARED WITH THE PRESENT METHOD OF TRANSPLANTING NURSERY SEEDLINGS THIS METHOD OF AFFORESTATION HAS SEVERE DISADVANTAGES - HEAVY MORTALITY DUE TO UNCERTAIN WEATHER CONDITIONS AND INSECT ATTACKS, AND UNEVEN SPACING WHICH WOULD AFFECT GROWTH,+ MR. IU SAID.

+THOUGH TREES ARE NO LONGER PLANTED IN HONG KONG FOR TIMBER OR FUEL, BECAUSE OF HIGH LABOUR COSTS NOWADAYS AND LAND LIMITATIONS, THEY ARE VALUABLE IN QUITE DIFFERENT AND PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANT WAYS. WITH THESE OBJECTIVES IN VIEW, SOME 300,000 TREES WERE PLANTED IN LAST YEAR AND A SIMILAR PROGRAMME IS EXPECTED TO BE CARRIED OUT THIS YEAR.+

+THEY PROVIDE AN EFFECTIVE COVER TO PROTECT THE SOIL FROM EROSION BY THE COMBINED FORCES OF THE WIND, SUN AND RAIN,+ HE EXPLAINED.

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+IF THE SOIL HAS NO VEGETATION COVER, EROSION MAY DEVELOP AND EVENTUALLY CAUSE LANDSLIPS, PARTICULARLY HAZARDOUS DURING THE RAINY SEASON, CHOKER UP STREAM COURSES WITH A DEPOSITION OF SILT AND GIVE RISE TO FLOODING OF CULTIVATED FIELDS AND LOW-LYING INHABITED AREAS+.

+FURTHERMORE, THE TREE LITTER ON THE GROUND, ACTING LIKE A SPONGE, CAN RETAIN WATER WHEN THERE IS A PLENTIFUL SUPPLY AND RELEASE IT IN THE DRY WEATHER, THUS ENSURING A REGULAR FLOW OF WATER IN THE STREAM THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.+

+IN HONG KONG WHERE RAIN IS SCARCE DURING SOME MONTHS OF THE YEAR BUT TORRENTIAL IN OTHERS, THIS MOISTURE-RETAINING ABILITY IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE AND EXPLAINS THE EXTENSIVE PLANTATIONS AND NATURAL WOODLAND IN THE CATCHMENT AREAS ABOVE THE RESERVOIRS,+ HE SAID.

ANOTHER IMPORTANT ROLE OF FOREST PLANTATIONS NOW GAINING MORE RECOGNITION, IS THEIR VALUE IN PROVIDING PLEASANT SURROUNDINGS FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE RECREATION ACTIVITIES OF THE URBAN POPULATION. ON WEEKENDS AND HOLIDAYS, MORE PEOPLE THAN EVER BEFORE ARE NOW GOING OUT TO THE COUNTRYSIDE, ESPECIALLY TO THE SCENIC FORESTRY AREAS AROUND THE RESERVOIRS. NEARLY 200 PICNIC AND BARBECUE SITES HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED BY THE AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES DEPARTMENT TO MAKE THEIR OUTINGS MORE CONVENIENT AND ENJOYABLE.

ALL THIS WORK IS SHOULDERED BY THE CONSERVATION AND FORESTS DIVISION OF THE AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES DEPARTMENT, WHICH HAS 13 FORESTRY POSTS, EACH MANNED BY 20 TO 30 STAFF, STRATEGICALLY LOCATED IN THE COUNTRY AREAS.

WITH MORE CITY DWELLERS GOING OUT TO THE COUNTRYSIDE - HIGHLY RECOMMENDABLE IN ITSELF - THESE FORESTRY WORKERS UNFORTUNATELY HAVE ANOTHER UNENVIABLE TASK TO TAKE UP - FIRE VIGILANCE.

+TO MANY PEOPLE THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST HILL FIRES MAY APPEAR TO BE UNNECESSARY OR EXCESSIVE+, MR. IU SAID. +BUT SURELY NO ONE, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO APPRECIATE THE COUNTRYSIDE FOR ITS RECREATION VALUES, WOULD LIKE TO SEE YEARS OF LABOUR AND CONSTRUCTIVE EFFORT REDUCED TO ASHES IN A FEW HOURS+.

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SPORTS PROGRAMME AT MORSE PARK

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THE DIRECTOR OF HOME AFFAIRS, MR. JOHN WALDEN, WILL OFFICIATE AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION SPORTS PROGRAMME ON WEDNESDAY (APRIL 21) AT 9 A.M. AT MORSE PARK, WONG TAI SIN.

THE SPORTS PROGRAMME IS CO-ORDINATED BY THE RECREATION AND SPORTS OFFICE OF EDUCATION DEPARTMENT, AND IS THE FIRST OF ITS KIND EVER HELD ON THE QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY.

IT AIMS AT PROVIDING A DAY OF SPORTS AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE.

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NOTE TO EDITORS:

MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO COVER THE EVENT.

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