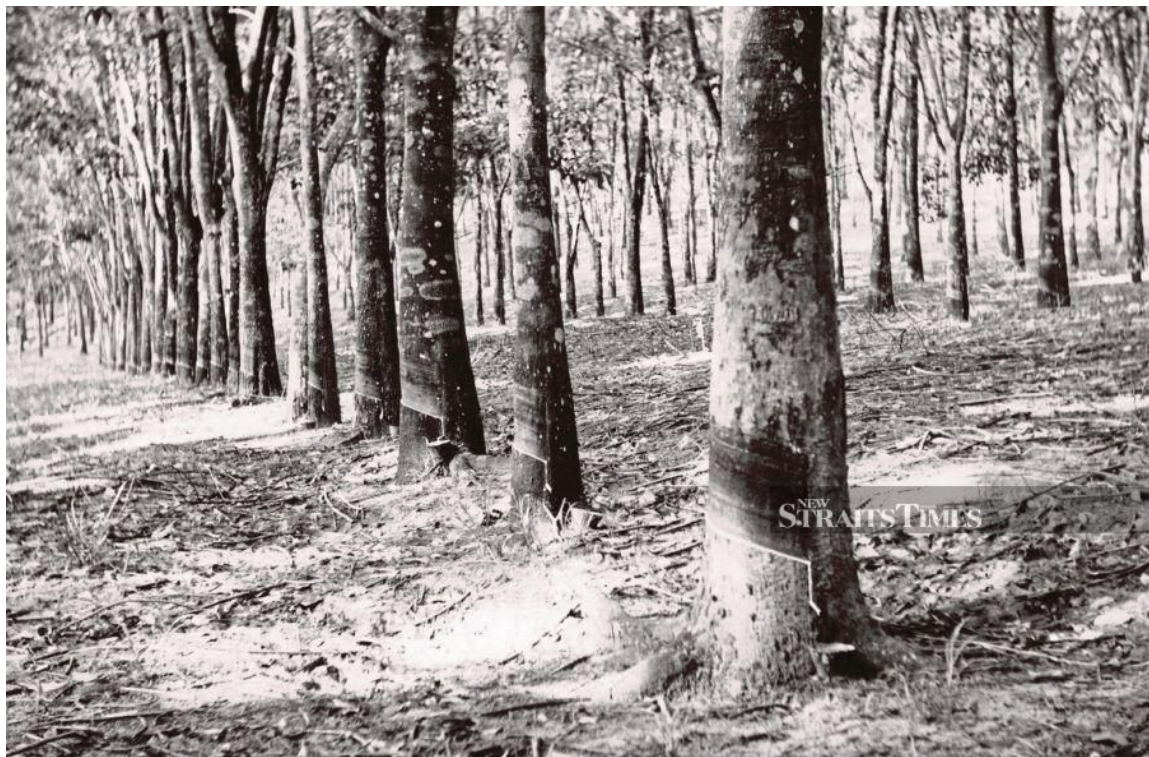


Estate Chronicles: When water cuts became fiesta time

By [Ravindran Raman Kutty](#) - January 22, 2023 @ 8:00am



Rows of rubber trees at an estate in the 1960s. During a water cut, the men would ride bicycles to carry the water from a nearby river while ladies did their equal share by carrying water using a 'kanda stick'. - NSTP file pic

The water supply to all our homes on the estate came from a water pump station in my father's tapping field.

The 100 houses in the estate were supplied with water from 8am to 5pm daily. After that, we would use water stored earlier until the next morning.

The water was stored in an old 2,000-litre diesel tank, courtesy of the estate workshop.

In the event of the occasional water cut, usually due to glitches at the pump station, the estate management would sometimes deliver water to the homes.

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Otherwise, we would use some of the stored water from the tank and turn to Mother Nature's source of water — the river near our estate.

My brothers and I would use old containers to ferry water from the river. These containers were once used to store latex.

Prior to using these containers, we would bring them home, cut the covers off with a metal chopper, wash them well, paint the inside walls of the containers and leave them to dry under the sun for a day or two.


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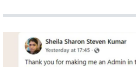
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Once dry, we would fill the drums with water for bathing and laundry purposes.

The water would still have a strong paint smell for a week or so, but the week would go by quickly and the smell would soon be gone and forgotten.

The river was about two kilometres away from our living quarters.

My brothers and I would make about three or four trips a day to and from the river to fill up our storage drums.

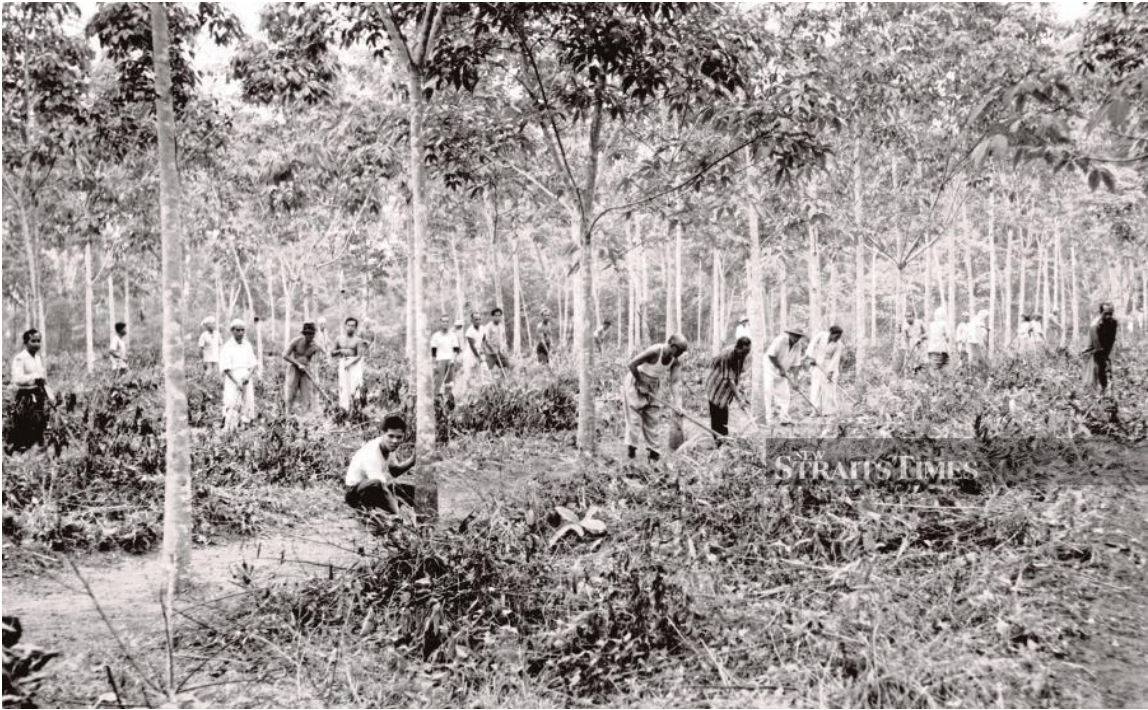
I, for one, would never tire from this chore; it was fun to challenge ourselves at balancing the water-filled latex containers on my father's good old ever-strong Raleigh bicycle.

The road home was filled with undulating laterite roads — this required clever and quick manoeuvring of the bicycle to avoid our containers falling and the collected water spilling onto the ground, as that would mean an extra walk back to the river to re-fill the containers.

While the men usually ride a bicycle to carry the water, ladies did their equal share by carrying water using a "kanda stick", balancing a pole on the shoulder with two pails on each end filled with water.

This was not an easy task, but the ladies were familiar with such a load as they carried their daily latex from the field using the kanda stick.

They would usually walk at a great speed whenever they carry a loaded kanda stick. This is an art, indeed.



Estate workers clearing weeds at a rubber estate in 1962. During a water cut, the men would ride bicycles to carry the water from a nearby river while ladies did their equal share by carrying water using a “kanda stick”. - NSTP file pic

Once home, my mother and sisters would sieve the water using a white cloth to rid it of as much sediment as possible before boiling the water for cooking and drinking.

The remainder would be left in the containers for future use. If it had rained before we filled our drums, then the water would be extra murky; and believe me, our bodies were made strong enough not just to carry heavy containers but to drink murky water, too!

On the home front, my mum and sisters fervently worried about water cuts, which could last for a minimum of 5 days.



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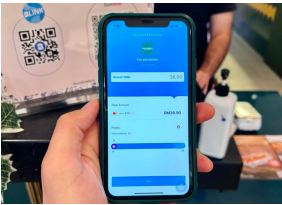


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For them, cooking, washing clothes, and bathing were serious matters of concern.

They would fill every small utensil with clean water, especially for cooking.

The stockkeeper, my eldest sister, would usually say if the water was enough or otherwise. We only stopped bringing in the river water, once she says it's enough for the day.

The river bank was a fiesta site. Ladies would be seen washing clothes while chatting among themselves; men and boys were seen filling up their latex containers with water and putting the world to rights in their own conversation.

Children would run around and swim in the knee-deep river. My friends and I would never miss a dip or two in the river, too.

Boys would fling off their shirts and slippers, jump into the river, and have boisterous splashing fun.

This was the highlight of the water cut.

What many would deem as a crisis and an inconvenience, at the estate we considered it a good opportunity to create fond memories of our time together as one big happy family.



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