

# Third phase of canal digging from tomorrow

By M. R. Rousseau

As the Acting President Mr. Justice Abdus Sattar formally inaugurates the digging of Dhudli Khal (canal) in Faridpur tomorrow (Sunday), the country enters the third phase of canal digging on the basis of voluntary participation of the people.

This year's (dry season of 1981-82) programme includes digging of 600 new canals in the four divisions of the country, as well as ensuring adequate flow of water through reforms and maintenance of the 1058 canals dug during the last two years.

A spokesman of the canal digging programme control and maintenance cell told the Bangladesh Times on Friday that this year's programme also included special measures for ensuring that the irrigation waters of these canals were "properly used to everybody's benefit."

The revolutionary programme of building up a network of irrigation-cum-drainage canals throughout the country was first undertaken at the personal initiative of late President Ziaur Rahman on December 1, 1979.

## CANAL IN EACH SUBDIVISION

Programmes for digging at least one canal in each of the 71 subdivisions of the country on the basis of voluntary labour of the people was taken up during the dry season of 1979-80. Although the programmes were to be implemented on the basis of voluntary labour of the people, provisions were kept for payment of 15 per cent wage in kind to the poor and landless peasants taking part in the programmes. The 15 per cent wages were to be paid in terms of wheat.

With a view to encouraging the peasants to take an active interest in the affairs of canals, the Government also decided to distribute power pumps free of cost, which were to be owned by the peasants cooperative societies. The Government also agreed to help the people in or-

ganisational matters and in meeting some incidental expenses.

## COORDINATION CELLS

Once the canal digging programme got underway, the union parishads and the Swarnirvar Gram Sarkars were entrusted with the duty of maintaining after the excavated and reexcavated canals. Special coordination cells were set up at the Ministerial, district and subdivision levels. The same arrangements continue to date.

Initially, it was decided to implement 103 schemes for digging 500 miles of canals for irrigating five lakh acres of land. The programme was revised in view of the "unprecedented enthusiasm of the people." The number of projects for the first year (1979-80) was increased to 250 (nine hundred miles of canal) to irrigate about eight lakh acres of land. All these projects were completed one month ahead of the schedule much to the benefit of cultivators of IRRI, Boro, and Aus crops. As alone rose to 25 lakh tons in 1980-81 from its 19 lakh ton level in 1979-80.

## TARGET SURPASSED

Inspired by the success in the very first year, the Government decided to undertake digging of 700 canals the following year, 1980-81. Eventually, however, the target was surpassed when by the end of the dry season of 1980-81, a total of 865 canals (2,713 miles long) were dug. These accounted for the 222 crore cubic feet of earth work.

As a result, irrigation facilities for another 15 lakh 50 thousand acres of land were created. Completion of these projects required the Government to distribute two lakh 87 thousand maunds of wheat, worth Taka three crores.

It is estimated that if the entire work had to be paid for then the completion of these projects would have cost the Government nothing less than Tk. 20 crore.

It is gathered that owing to the digging of 1058 canals in the country during the last two years, opportunities for producing an additional 15 lakh tons of rice and wheat have been created.