

Dacca, Tuesday, September 2, 1980

Canal network

A canal digging programme three times larger than the previous one, is reportedly on the anvil. Surely we feel enthused by the last success to apply ourselves more than before to carry forward what we have identified as an option, to build ourselves a year-round irrigation system. However, in the light of projected expansion in the programme, the technical aspects of it all unquestionably come to the fore for a comprehensive and a close look at them before we go ahead.

First, the new canals we are going to have will either bear links to the old ones or these might be drawing water from the same source river. Using one river as the source of many man-made channels involves a hydrological question of an apportionment of water that will not affect the normal flow conditions of the source itself. As a matter of fact, a special gauging of the river's year-round capacity to lend water, to the canals has to precede the actual digging exercises. Obviously the monsoon waters will be either in the shape of rains or spillage in extreme conditions. Thus these cannot be counted upon for the purpose of any systematic availability of water in the canals. In this vein, the river-bed conditions too have to be taken into consideration.

Going by the last experience the canal water came almost without exception from the river and not from the subterranean level. Even an unfuzzy picture of the subsoil water flows must be before us for the simple reason that the seepage from the river which is one aspect of water replenishment at the underground level, may be unwittingly interfered with.

Third, the canals network is being built to provide water to the adjoining lands. Now, that water has to have a way of draining out so that no logging problem is created. This means that a drainage system should be a necessary corollary to the irrigation channels originating from the feeder canals.

Most probably we have either got past the stage of reexcavation or are very near it. Predictably it is going to be the turn for altogether new canals. The reexcavation for the most part took place on the moribund courses. Digging new canals may involve acquiring land, an aspect which should be attended to methodically before it is too late.

The whole programme may be seen in harmony with the latest government approach to go for small, short-gestation projects in preference to large, long-term ones. Thus the effort should be to make a multipurpose use of the canal network.