

Canal digging

Available canal digging records read like splendid success stories. When the programme was first unfurled for implementation in the dry season of 1979-80, plan targets were 103 schemes for digging 500 miles of canals and irrigating 5 lakhs acres of land. So enthusiastically was the canal digging idea received that the plans for 1979-80 had to be broadened to incorporate additional schemes. The revised programmes for 1979-80 called for 250 schemes to create 900 miles of canals for irrigating about 8 lakh acres of land. The planned targets were stated to be achieved ahead of schedule. Encouraged by these pioneering successes, it was decided to undertake a greater number of projects in the following year, 1980-81. Accordingly, the objectives set for 1980-81 were completion of 700 projects. But this time too, plan targets were surpassed when 865 canals were completed by the end of the dry season in 1980-81. In this inspiring backdrop, the Acting President Mr. Justice Abdus Sattar, inaugurates the current season's canal digging programme from Faridpur today. This year's programme is to dig of 600 canals and to ensure adequate flow of waters in the canals dug during the last two years.

The strategy adopted in the main for canal digging so far, has proved to be effective and appropriate in our conditions. The ventures were attempted, relying to a very large degree on voluntary labour. It goes to the credit of the people and their organisers that they could mobilise voluntary labour on the scale required and desired. Partial completion of work in the projects were paid for in kind,—by the distribution of wheat—which has cost the government Taka 3 crores. Estimates say that if the entire schemes had to be paid for, then it would cost at least Taka 20 crore.

Experiences of canal digging during 1979-80 and 1980-81 are with us. This experience should guide us correctly in the future. A pattern has emerged by now revealing the shortcomings and what needs to be done to get the optimum continuing benefits from the canals. These factors will have to be attended seriously to consolidate the success of the programme. The north-western region probably deserves a portioning of greater number of projects considering that area's peculiarities and needs. In areas not well-served by rivers, deep tube-well facilities created can be complementary to the canal digging process. Where rivers are not many and the tributaries widely separated, these may be connected by linking canals to extend the irrigation networks.