

Canal network

Canal digging exercises are no more restricted to sporadic examples of the Ulashi type in experimentation stages. The comprehensive countrywide canal digging programme heralded and set in motion in late 1979 by late President Ziaur Rahman has today achieved notable results. Up to date 865 canals have been dug with total length of 2,961 miles and bringing thus 15.50 lakh acres under lean season irrigation facility. The additional food grain yield as a result of the canals is estimated at 21 lakh tons. The goal of increasing food production to 20 million tons during the SFYP depends largely on extension of irrigation in a total area of 72 lakh acres by 1985, from the 1977-78 level of 28.75 lakh acres. Understandably, new canal networks will have to come into existence to lead to the fulfilment of plan targets.

The canal programme flourishing everywhere points to the need from this stage onwards for their greater coordination under an overall master plan. In the near future, a greater number of canals will spread over hitherto uncovered areas, maybe new ones in the vicinity of old ones. The entire length and breadth of available arable lands might soon be criss-crossed by a maze of canals. So surveys of hydrological aspects and other factors like consequences of flooding, spillage and drainage require careful consideration from now for integrating these into a balanced irrigation network.

The main plank of the strategy for canal digging, when first contemplated, was voluntary participation by the masses. This strategy was prompted by several considerations as saving otherwise staggering expenses to be incurred from hiring labour, rousing enthusiasm of ordinary people in the interests of development activities and readily demonstrating to them the good results to be obtained for collective benefits by giving their labour freely. One recent report says that the canal digging programme failed to mobilise the desired degree of voluntary work participation or support and much of the work had to be completed through direct payment in cash or kind. If this had been the case, then the reasons for such must be ascertained and ways and means found out to increase the rate of voluntary work participation. The cooperation of local bodies should be sought and ensured for the purpose. The other imperative for continuing success of canal digging would be keeping work sites duly supplied with necessary equipment, particularly the pump sets. And whether voluntary labour becomes available or labour is paid by local contribution the canal digging process must continue in full vigour.