

DACCA, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 1979

Canal-building

The unexploited part of our resourcefulness is larger than what we have been able to harness for national development so far. Yet barring academic discussions on, or at best half-hearted efforts at reversing our endowment utilisation pattern we could not do much else until very recently. Whenever a natural calamity struck us in fury the inherent weaknesses of our monetary, inputs and infrastructural bases were at once exposed driving us to the dilemma of keeping up development amidst a series of contingent measures to manage the crisis situations. The balance tipped towards the latter, rather inexorably, and the growth targets proved elusive in the end. Increased food and input imports that we resorted to for meeting the aftermath of a bad monsoon, flood or drought marked by a serious cereal deficit and the forebodings of reduced productivity in the immediate future made us critically dependent on external help. From such an outward look a disconcerting thing followed apart from others. The development agencies' organisational structures and operational methods got all geared to the persistent end of receiving aid with virtually little in them to be devoted to self-relying work.

We can ride out many of these grave shortcomings of resource constraints, infrastructural inadequacies and organisational snags if we wholeheartedly engage ourselves in the proposed nationwide canal digging campaign and make it a success. It is good augury that our women leaders have expressed that they would participate in this unique venture. First and foremost, the endeavour promises to establish a tangible co-relationship among land, man and water which has been a coveted goal with us. The networks can give us a self-sustaining water management and utilisation base in that this basic input will be conserved from monsoon overflows for use in the lean season. The possibility of reservoirs coming up around the feeder canals is also opened up. Short of a massive flood control and water use system which cannot be built without extraordinarily generous external assistance, the present strategy sounds very sensible.

Besides, significantly, if voluntary participation on this scale can be accomplished it will certainly help untap the hidden energy and work enthusiasm of our people. The local body leaders will also be put to test, perhaps for the first time so much.

In essence, doubling food output is dependent on year round cultivation not only on known croplands but also in additional areas waiting to be reclaimed. This purpose is to be served by excavating the silted water channels as sources of the proposed canals or as the canals themselves. At the same time many altogether new canals have to be dug. In any case, water has to come from some source, sub-soil or surface. In the latter case the Water Board ought to train the rivers as much as they can simultaneous with the localised canal digging efforts.