

## Revised Canal Digging Target

The Kingpin of our development goal is the attainment of self-sufficiency in food by the doubling of food production within the next five years. In this regard the country-wide canal digging programme launched by President Ziaur Rahman a few months ago as the first phase of the 'peaceful revolution', has gained momentum. The massive response of the people to this programme speaks of not only their awareness but also their determination to become self-sufficient in food.

Expressing his satisfaction over the 'big success' of the programme President Ziaur Rahman told a group of journalists on Tuesday at Patali Khal Project in Cox's Bazar that the revised target for digging one hundred sixty canals would be further expanded to cover 250 canals. It is really heartening. The President also pointed out that those who criticised the programme at the time it was launched have now come to realise and recognise its tremendous impact and positive headway in the countryside.

It is worth mentioning in this connection that according to the original programme 103 canal digging projects totalling a length of about 500 miles in all the 71 subdivisions were to be completed through voluntary labour. Enthused by initial success people from different parts of the country specially from the southern and south-western parts subsequently pressed for inclusion in the programme new schemes in their areas. The number of projects thus went up from 103 to 144 with the length of the canals increasing to 700 miles.

It is encouraging to note that the expanded national canal digging programme would now roughly involve the works for excavation or re-excavation of about one thousand miles of canal throughout the country. It gives one cause for satisfaction that when asked about actual performance of the attainment of the target in terms of canal digging mileage the President said that over three hundred miles of canal had already been completed.

So far thousands of acres of

land which had hitherto been considered fallow due to paucity of water are now showing signs of being turned into green fields with paddy and wheat because of their coverage under canal digging projects. The Patali Khal project is one of these success stories. According to report it would help raising three crops in about six thousand acres covered under the said project this year and in about 40,000 acres next year. The project has a length of five and a half miles and forty six pumps, distributed free of cost have been put into operation for irrigation purposes during the current season. Official estimates to the effect that the additional crop raised in the project areas would be valued at Taka one crore this year and according to one projection at Taka 30.50 crore next year generates a sense of great optimism in the hearts of all.

The success of the canal digging projects has both national and international significance. It would help augment and mobilise our internal resources which the aid-giving friendly countries are insisting on. The international donor organisations and friendly countries have begun to take note of the response of the people at the grass-root level in the national development efforts in which foreign aid acts as catalytic agent. Bangladesh's efforts for mobilising international assistance for its ambitious Second Five Year Plan are now being better responded to. Besides this, as pointed out by President Ziaur Rahman it is not merely the economic benefits that would accrue to the community or the individual that make the programme important. The real importance lies in the fact that for the first time in the history of this land the small land holder and the big land owners have been brought together to work on the same project.

It is hoped that the revised target for canal excavation and re-excavation would be surpassed ahead of schedule which would necessitate further upward revision and make Bangladesh a show piece of development or voluntary mass participation.