

Feature Development

Turning Disability into Working Hands

by Sadaf Noori

THE physically handicapped are not a curse to society but on the contrary, a blessing in disguise — this is the slogan of 'SARPV' (Social, Assistance and Rehabilitation for the Physically Vulnerable), an NGO for handicapped people.

Shahidul Haq himself an orthopaedically vulnerable runs this organization. Before going through its nature of work, Shahidul Haq enthusiastically explained the inner reason which prompted him to take such a challenging job.

According to him, being an orthopaedically vulnerable, he never thought or felt that he didn't have any rights or opportunity like others. But soon he realised when he came out after finishing his studies and applied for different jobs. But everytime he had been turned down at viva boards only due to his physical problems. Since then he accepted it as a challenge and decided to train handicapped people with technical education so they could fight their way out in a less than caring, if not hostile, society and also leave aside their frustration. In this way 'SARPV' came into being in 1988.

The main aims and objectives of this organization is to bring about a radical change in the attitude towards life of these vulnerable people. This includes giving them a sense of confidence that they are a potential force to reckon with instead of a burden on society. This organization can add a newer dimension to the traditional concept of the handicapped and it is more adaptive and comprehensive.

At present, vulnerable people are engaged in repairing and maintaining all sorts of

electronics goods, household gadgets and appliances like radio, TV, VCR, VCP etc. One instructor and one technician are conducting the training course. The classes are held five days a week from Saturday to Wednesday, from 4 pm to 7 pm.

The difference of this organization from others is that — this organisation only deals with people who are physically vulnerable in an orthopaedic sense. There is a lot of reasons which make people orthopaedically physically vulnerable

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such as, by birth, or by any physical abuse of child, any kind of sickness, natural disaster, wrong medical treatment, malnutrition, any kind of road accident etc.

Worldwide, there are almost 50 crore people who are physically vulnerable. Among them a sizeable proportion is orthopaedically physically vulnerable. According to the statistics of the ILO, the number of the handicapped will increase upto 70 crore in the near future. An alarming number of them is flocked in the Third World countries because of various reasons. They are subjected to suppression and neglect because of social and economic condition.

In Bangladesh, one of the poor countries of the Third World, almost 90% of the handicapped and disabled live below poverty line. Due to

their physical problems, they are deprived of their basic rights and not getting legal protection and opportunity in the field of education, employment, rehabilitation and similar other areas.

'SARPV' people prove through their skilled work that they are no more a burden and has become an example to society of how far a man can go without enough education.

Anika one of the vulnerable of this organization is quite confident about herself which she expressed without any

hesitation, I never look to the future with a fatalistic resignation, I always try to be justifiably optimistic and have always taken an active role in my own management. I have never been a passive tourist through my life. Anika is going to be the president of this organization very soon.

According to her, When people come first, they seem to be totally broken, disheartened, life bear no meaning for them, but after working a few weeks and in the course of the changes of environment, and with our proper initiative and encouragement, they can see some light of hope and move towards the ultimate goal to achieve something.

Shahidul Haq has a lot of unique ideas to expand his organization but there are

stumbling-blocks which are difficult for him to overcome all alone.

He mentioned some problems facing him: lack of proper information in this field, at the same time government is totally indifferent about this issue. According to him, in the developed world where physically handicapped have been given social security, are getting economic supports to lead a better life, whereas countries like ours consider the handicapped a burden and deprive them of their basic needs.

The other great problem he mentioned was lack of legislation to protect their interests. He thinks the government should make comprehensive laws which will cover the needs and rights of disabled persons so that no discrimination will be allowed against persons with disabilities.

He further informed that his organization wants to establish a disability resource centre.

It will aim to collect information, produce books, conduct training for trainers, carry out research works on different issues relating to disabilities.

'SARPV' has other branches in some remote areas which help people when any natural disaster hits.

Shahid wants to overcome all these problems and believes he has a long way to go but it is not any body's personal problems, though it is a problem of whole society and to overcome these we need united support. To develop such scheme, the government and NGOs should come forward with financial help.

Chasing a Mirage in India's Thar Desert

by A J Singh

GOOD intentions are never enough to ensure benefits from a development project. Faulty planning and lack of foresight can create more hardships for people than help. And that is what has happened along a canal in India's Thar desert.

The 649 kilometre Rajasthan Canal — renamed Indira Gandhi Nehru Pariyojana (IGNP) after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984 — was first conceived in 1948. Its completion was to ensure the greening of the Thar in the state of Rajasthan.

This desert extends over close to 20 million hectares and accounts for nearly 58 per cent of Rajasthan and six per cent of India.

stroyed by salination.

'The farmers are unhappy,' says Sunil Chouhan, a college teacher. 'They feel cheated. The canal hasn't proven to be the blessing it was made out to be.'

Corruption among officials has added to the woes. For example, they connived with contractors to use substandard material for lining the canal. A one-time contractor from Birkampur village said that instead of using a double-brick lining, the contractors used one-brick lining only.

'In some cases, they've used sand instead of cement or have just not compressed the soil enough,' he said.

Besides petty corruption,

drainage naturally causes waterlogging,' says Sanjoy Ghosh, an expert at IGNP.

Waterlogging has produced weeds in areas served by the canal, causing problems for farmers like Gaje Singh. His fields are covered with the weeds, which have destroyed his groundnut crop and turned his fields into a wasteland.

'The weeds that you see on the land are of no use even as fodder,' says Singh. 'The cattle don't touch it.'

Where waterlogging has not destroyed the crops, salination has taken over.

Heavy irrigation in the area created a false water table on

planned in the 1950s,' says a researcher.

Critics say that even before the course of the canal, was planned the authorities were aware of large areas lying on IGNP with a hard-pan of gypsum, a short distance below the surface.

'That is why it was decided to line the canal to minimise seepage leading to water clogging and salinity,' says R S Rathore, a teacher.

But to cut costs, the distributaries and water courses were not lined. And the inevitable happened.

Not only this, the recommendations of the Food and Agricultural Organisation were ignored. Based on studies two decades ago the FAO suggested developing pastureland, keeping the topography and traditional occupation of people in view.

Today, according to official estimates 34 per cent of the irrigated area of the canal in stage one is affected by waterlogging and salinity. Perhaps this could have been avoided had the farmers been educated about the crops they should cultivate.

For instance, many farmers anxious to get quick returns from the land — in the light of availability of abundant water — planted cash crops like groundnuts using all the available water. This led to disastrous results.

'Today, they are either forced to sell their land, or leave it fallow while working for wages elsewhere to pay off debts,' says Kalpana Sharma, an observer.

On the positive side, the canal has been able to meet the drinking water needs of many areas of Rajasthan. The canal command area accounts for farm produce worth \$150 million a year. With the completion of Phase Two this is expected to triple.

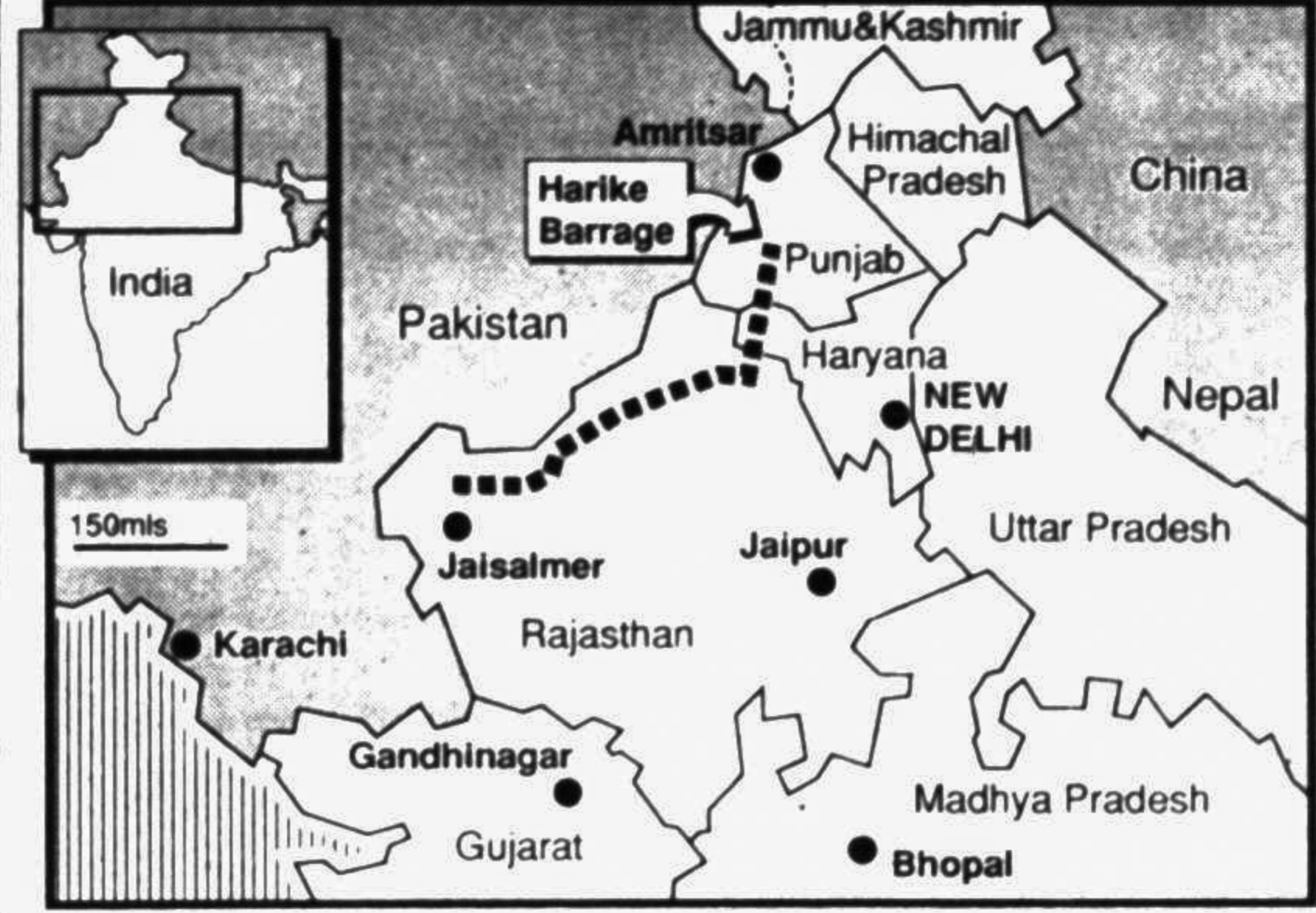
With the advent of irrigation, lifestyles are changing. Nomads have started settling down on land. The population has begun to soar. So has the demand for fuelwood and grazing land for the cattle.

Some observers think that instead of greening the desert, the canal could, in fact, increase desertification if the regeneration of pastures and hillsides and afforestation of waterlogged areas is not urgently undertaken.

As one drives along the canal, starting from Halke Barrage at Sutej in Punjab to Mohangarh in the middle of the Thar desert, a whole new world opens up: of technical marvel that is the canal, and of the construction flaws that mar it. — Gemini News

A J Singh is a freelance Indian journalist who writes regularly on environmental and development issues.

Indira canal



Aim: to provide irrigation facilities in the Thar desert
Length: 649km - 204km feeder canal and 445km main canal
Phase I completed costing \$240 million, has irrigation potential of 578,000 hectares. Work in progress on **Phase II**, covering an area of 1.1 million hectares

The canal piercing the desert's heart is the largest irrigation project in India. With its 8,000 kilometre distribution system and an area of 1.5 million hectares, the canal is to provide irrigation and drinking water to six western districts of Rajasthan.

Phase One of IGNP, completed at a cost of \$240 million, has a planned irrigation potential of 578,000 hectares. Work is progressing on Phase Two, covering an area of one million hectares. Impressive statistics. But only on paper.

In practice what the IGNP has done is rather dismal. Instead of lush green fields dotting the desert, only odd patches of waterlogged fields overgrown with weeds can be seen, or land completely de-

the short-sightedness and even sheer ignorance of project executors has created monumental waterlogging problems.

Experts estimate that waterlogging has destroyed 156,000 hectares of land in the Sriganganagar district alone. The faulty design of the main canal, with water percolating the banks and flooding fields, is responsible for this.

In addition, the water flowing through the canal was to be shared between the two stages of the irrigation system. Instead, all the water was used in the first stage because the second stage of the canal is still not ready.

the hard gypsum layer beneath the land. The water then mixed with salts in the soil and with the high rate of evaporation in the desert, a hard crust soon formed on the land, making it unfit to grow anything.

Experts at the Central Arid Zone Research Institute at Jodhpur, in Rajasthan, say that waterlogging and salinity are well known problems that plague irrigation systems. In fact, three earlier irrigation projects in western Rajasthan had experienced it.

'What surprises me the most is that not even a rudimentary geological survey was undertaken when the Rajasthan canal was being

Myanmar Streamlines Energy Explorations

by Minn Thu

THESE good and bad news for Myanmar's oil industry. The good news is that the country, formerly known as Burma, has just signed two new production-sharing agreements with American oil firms for the rehabilitation and development of old onshore oil and gas fields on a joint venture basis.

Trend International (Bermuda) Ltd and Apache Oil Inc will also be doing exploration and exploitation work in the Prome east area.

But the flipside to this is the pullout of Australia's BHP, one of the ten pioneering foreign oil companies which responded to Myanmar's invitation to explore and exploit oil and gas reserves both onshore and offshore.

BHP, according to reports, will be followed out by South Korea's Yukong, which was the first foreign company in 1989 to sign an agreement with Myanmar.

Sources are saying that by the end of 1992, which is the end of the three-year contract of the 10 pioneers, only about half of the original foreign companies will be left in the country. The ten firms paid a total of US\$447.6 million as signature bonus and invested US\$357.13 million in the three-year exploration period.

The pullout is prompted by the unproductive efforts of the oil firms so far. Industry sources said that after three years, many of the testwells sank by the companies yielded not much on a commercially feasible scale.

Only Dutch Shell managed to find gas at Aphyauk in the Yangon area. Yields from these wells are being sold to the government.

The government has been

drilling testwells on its own and seemed to have struck oil in three or four wells in the Prome area. Sources say the wells may be producing about 1,000 barrels a day.

Two American firms — Amoco and Unocal — were also among the pioneers which came in three years ago. But like BHP and Yukong, their efforts did not produce much results.

These and other firms are reportedly examining and re-assessing data they have ob-

The energy industry needs to shape up. Not only did foreign oil companies find their search fruitless but even the energy situation has deteriorated.

tained in order to decide whether they should pullout as well or extend their contracts. Agreements signed by the companies can be extended for one year for the next two years.

The problem seems to be not a lack of oil and gas to exploit.

Studies have shown that there is oil and gas to find. They have estimated Myanmar's future discovery potential at 800 million barrels of oil and 7,000 billion cubic feet of natural gas. As of early 1990, a study funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said Myanmar had proven recoverable oil reserves of 114 million barrels and gas reserves of 139 billion cubic feet.

Myanmar, which had started to move from extreme centralisation towards a greater market orientation, counted on, increased oil exploration to hasten the change. The government even designated 1992, the end of the three-year exploration contracts with the pioneering for-

sign firms, as the year of economic development for the country. The agreements signed with the 10 companies covered 32 per cent of the estimated future discovery.

The UNDP-funded study suggests problems other than the lack of resources to explore and exploit. According to the study, an increased oil production drive in Myanmar would require a major rehabilitation effort in all producing fields as well as the delineation and development of probable

and undeveloped but proven reserves. Such efforts would cost about US\$668 million and the investments would not completely solve the problem.

Industry observers say investments aimed at raising production rates would be fruitful only if appropriate technology was mobilised as well. Inappropriate policies and lack of autonomy in sector management have also contributed to the woes of the oil industry.

Observers stress the need for the industry to shape up as they point out that during the past few years, not only did foreign oil companies find their search fruitless but even the energy situation in Myanmar has deteriorated.

The country has lapsed from being self-sufficient to deficient in oil. There was a sharp decline in crude production from the average 10 million barrels per year in the 1980s to the present 5.6 million barrels annually. Petrol is still being rationed and frequent electrical power failures remain.

The country's four major energy sector institutions have an estimated total external debt of US\$1 billion. For the last three years, the country has failed to pay US\$90 million in principal and US\$50 million in interests due to foreign exchange difficulties.

Trend and Apache, sources say, provide some ray of hope for Myanmar, particularly its oil industry. Neither Trend nor Apache would say how much they would be investing or how much they paid as signature bonus.

Trend would be engaged in the rehabilitation and development of the old oilfields in the Letpando and Taywintung areas in the upcountry while Apache will concentrate on the old gas and oilfields in Prome east, Pyalo and Paukkaung areas.

With the political situation in Myanmar remaining uncertain and some of the foreign oil firms quitting, Myanmar is hopeful that the entry of the two new oil companies will help revitalise the energy sector.

The reduced oil production is attributed to the advanced stage of depletion of most of the fields, lack of adequate maintenance and well completion, and inadequate equipment.

The only promising prospect for gas would be the development of discovered offshore reserves 45 metres deep in the Gulf of Martaban some 90 kilometres from shore.

The government has officially estimated the country's gas reserves at 7,000 billion cubic feet but the UNDP study, which based its estimates on test wells drilled so far, puts the figure at 5,000 billion cubic feet. Of this, 1,600 billion cubic feet could be considered as proven recoverable reserves.

The UNDP study suggested that a 75 billion cubic feet production level could be achieved for a period of 15 years from the present proven reserves. This could be increased to 150-175 billion cubic feet per year if the gas potential of the two gas well structures were confirmed.

Other domestic fuel resources are unreliable as there have been inadequate assessments so far of their total potential.

Thus, the entry of the two new American companies at this time is a major boost to the floundering oil industry. They will provide some of the resources needed for the rehabilitation of existing facilities, which the UNDP study said is a priority.

Myanmar at present just does not have the resources to undertake on its own the rehabilitation required. The country is saddled by a US\$4 billion external debt and has also to cope with the suspension of all aids and loans which was imposed by donors following the 1988 coup.

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New directions in farming: Industrial harvests command growing acreage — Photo INP