

Feature

Development

Commitment to Development Activities

THE day was Wednesday, December 23, 1992. On that day a visit was made to Sarachar union to identify problems of the people of Bhandra village and a few neighbouring ones to draw a practical plan of action (PPA) for launching innovative preservation of fruits and vegetables by solar drying process and improved stove. To preserve, protect and conserve environmental balance. The main goal is to form groups of disadvantaged and underprivileged rural women, the youth and the unemployed educated youth in the process of bringing them into mainstream development activities and prepare all members of such poorest groups to deliver services to them at an opportune moment.

The spirits of development activities actually took me to Sarachar union after a nine-month relapse from relief activities that were carried out after April 1992 cyclone that ravaged some parts of Dilaipur Union, Halimpur, Hlochia and Sarachar areas under Bajitpur Thana of Kishorganj District, killing 10 persons including a child.

As a planner and implementor of the development activities in favour of Gono Bikash Sangstha (GBS) — a registered, non-profit and non-governmental organization (NGO) devoted to social development and environment development issues, I went to Sarachar.

Charged with the responsibility of initiating and taking preparatory steps towards launching the project on Integrated Education and Environment Development Programmes, we went for social mobilization activities there.

M A Abul Hashem Bhuiyan, a great social worker and our lo-

cal GBS patron, received us. Soon after Bhuiyan proposed that we visited the eye-camp that was being held at the nearby Shivanath Bilateral High School, Sarachar. Bangladesh Dristiheen Foundation (BDF) had been of-

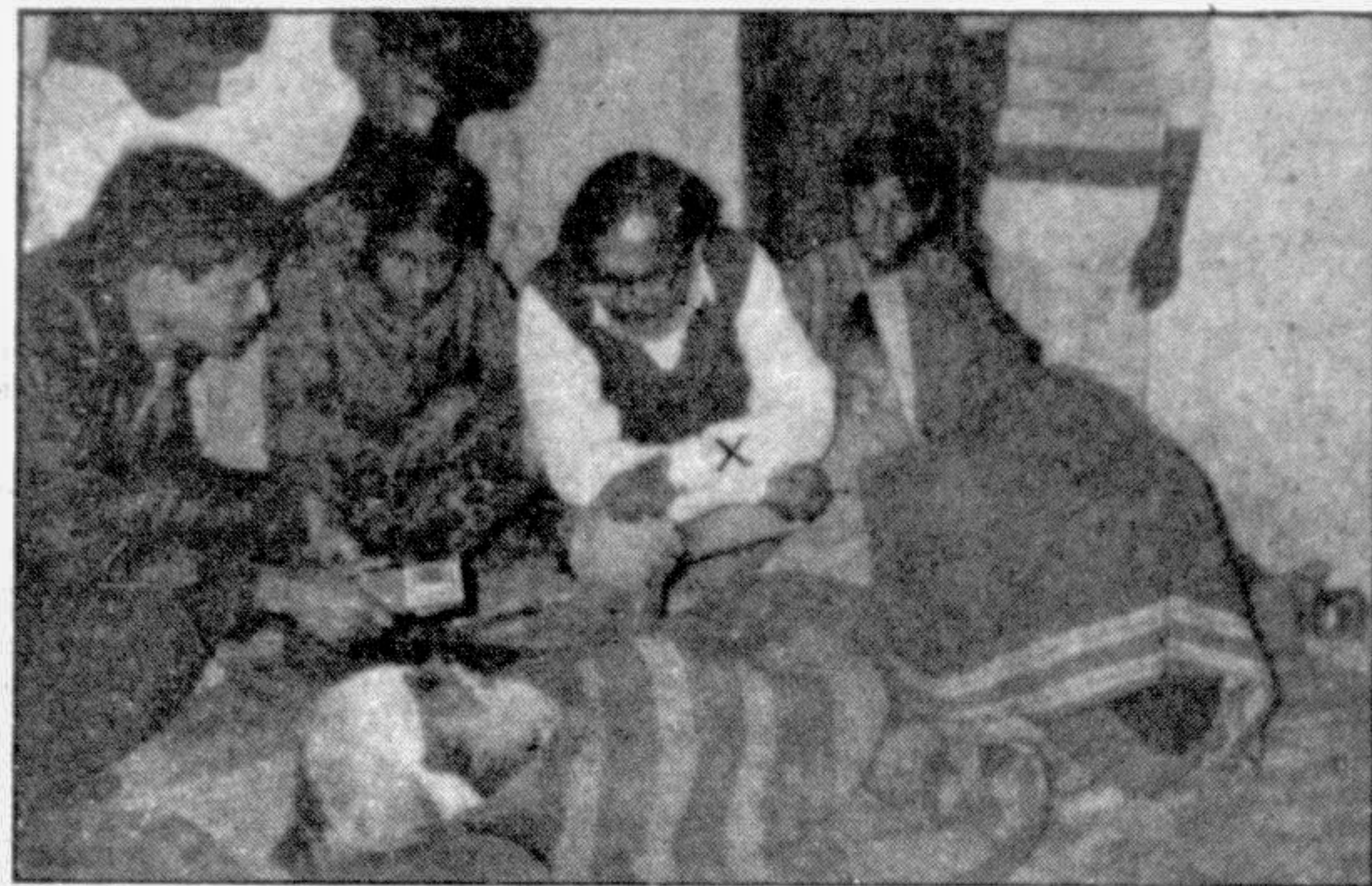
fering eye-camp services in collaboration with Sarachar Bazar Bank Samity, Shivanath Bilateral High School Authority and Pratibha Shahitya Sangsad from December 17-25, 1992, including a two-day eye examination with 1-day major operational activities. A total of 57 major eye operation and 20

minor operations were carried out by physicians organized by the Dristiheen Foundation. A total of 1,500 patients, however, attended the camp. All these patients were given first hand primary treatment and medicine free of cost.

The eye-camp ended on December 25, 1992 through distribution of glasses to the operated patients. Locally managed under the active supervision and over all operational implementation, Hashem Bhuiyan, the patients and the local organizers claimed that the eye camp managed last year, was a tremendous success. The workers of the Bangladesh Dristiheen Foundation, however, expressed fear that the incidence of eye problems have increased significantly with acute malnutrition and sufferings among the older people have rather increased, the workers opined.

The Bangladesh Dristiheen Foundation will carry out follow-up of the operation cases on January 26, 1993 through checking up of development and reflection of adjustment to the power glasses distributed by them free of cost.

M A Rub, the writer is the director, Gono Bikash Sangstha (GBS) — a NGO devoted to environment and development issues in the promotion of global and national progress and peace and prosperity.



M A Abul Hashem Bhuiyan, Patron, Gono Bikash Sangstha (GBS) and Chairman, (Crossed) Sarachar Bazar Bank Samity is seen talking with a recuperating eye-patient at Shivanath Bilateral High School Buildings where "Bangladesh Dristiheen Foundation" held an eye-camp for the suffering people.

The Revolution that is Sweeping Indonesia

by Stephen Carr from Indonesia

TRY making a morning phone call in Jakarta. The creaking overloaded system might not yield a line until the afternoon. It is often quicker to dispatch a courier than wait for the phone to work.

When you do get a line wrong numbers and inaudible replies are the norm. Yet if you want to make an international call or send a fax, provided you are not routed through the local network, the connections are instantaneous and the lines clear as a bell.

At outlets of Indosat, the state telecommunications company, you can go into a booth, press a button with the name of your home country on it and immediately hear an operator loud and clear, on the other side of the world. Faxes are quick and inexpensive.

Indosat, which runs this huge archipelago nation's external telecommunications, was formed in 1966. The economy of Indonesia was then in ruins and the country isolated from the world.

Since then increasing globalisation of trade and Indonesia's rising exports and greater integration into the world economy have made efficient telecommunication a necessity.

Being hooked into the global information network is good for trade, but it has political implications, too.

When the 27 provincial capitals of Indonesia were given international direct dialling to 185 locations worldwide, they included Dili, capital of east Timor.

During the recent political turmoil there the government may have preferred to keep the incident quiet. Instant communications made sure news of the shooting was soon all over the world.

In the turbulent years of Sukarno, Indonesia's first president, Indosat had a shaky start. The company was run for over a decade by ITT. It was taken over by the state in 1980 and then had a staff of 129.

Today it has 1,590 employees and is a model state enterprise run like a private company. Staff are assessed on productivity and given targets to reach.

It began a direct dial service with eight countries in 1981. Using two satellites over the Indian and Pacific oceans, communication with two-thirds of the globe became possible.

The first step was linking with northern neighbour Malaysia. Laying an undersea cable between northern Sumatra and Penang Island began the following year. Then Jakarta hooked into the Intelsat system, allowing digital data transmissions and direct dialling with 53 countries. An international facsimile ser-

vice started in 1984 and telteks began using the store-and-forward system. In the late 1980s more submarine cables were laid, connecting Indonesia with Australia and Singapore. Six Indonesian cities could direct dial 90 countries. An international exchange began routing calls through Medan, north Sumatra. Building began on Indosat headquarters in Jakarta.

Next came membership of the International Maritime Satellite System (Inmarsat). This network, providing sea, air and earth links, is ideal for linking the scattered fragments of Indonesia's vast archipelago.

Efficient communication is the key to an improved economy. What is happening in Southeast Asia is a model for developing countries. The fragmented country of Indonesia, scene of the just concluded Non-aligned summit, has made spectacular progress in communications in the last few years. International direct dialling began only in the 1980s.

The Inmarsat terminal is cheap, weighs under five kilos and allows global satellite transmission on public tele and electronic mail networks.

The country has three million square kilometres of sea within its borders — more than the land area. Its 5,000 remote inhabited islands need a telecommunications system that does not rely on radio transmissions. In its first year of operation, the Inmarsat system attracted 11 subscribing ships.

Videotext, electronic mail, database accessing and a computer network followed. The year 1990 saw the opening of an automatic telegraph exchange. Work started on a fibre optic cable that will link 13 nations from Indonesia to France. It will be ready in 1994. Other underwater fibre optic cables linking with Indonesia are the Trans-Pacific ones: the Hong Kong, Japan and Korea cable, the Pacific Rim West line between Sydney and Guam and the North Pacific cable connecting Japan to the United States via Alaska.

Corporate customers now have access to the Intelsat Business Service, which gives fast communication with the Pacific rim's main business centres in Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan and north America.

Another service, Intelnat, provides financial news, bank-

ing and other business information from Intelsat centres in Hong Kong, Sydney and Paris.

Despite the importance of these forays into high-tech telecommunications, Indosat's main cash earner is operator-assisted overseas phone calls. Its fastest growing new services are electronic mail, re-routing international television broadcasts and international direct dialling.

Perumtel, Indonesia's domestic telephone network, is increasingly embarking on joint ventures with Indosat. Since it began using Indosat's main exchange for its international telex traffic in 1990, it broke a five-year record of declining traffic.

Deciding on the right hardware for the future is difficult for any telecommunications company. According to Indosat President Tjahjono Soerjodibrotoro, telecommunications products can be obsolete even before they progress beyond the development stage.

"Such frenetic pace places developing markets such as Indonesia's in a bewildering and often confusing position. When to invest and how to choose from the array of systems currently available... the question of standardisation in a rapidly evolving global industry. These questions are not up to one country alone."

Transferring some of Indosat's corporate spirit to Perumtel, is perhaps a more readily attainable goal. Recently the two, together with a consortium of banks, set up a system of computerised cash dispensers. Indosat also helped Perumtel digitalise nine local exchanges and install 15,000 new telephone lines.

Construction of an international exchange in eastern Indonesia is being considered to stimulate economic growth in this relatively undeveloped region. The government is also embarking on a mass digitalisation of trunk exchanges. It aims to lay more than seven million new telephone lines by the turn of the century.

A second telecommunications network is seen as a precondition for elevation to the ranks of Asia's boom economies like Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan. As production costs rise in these countries, Indonesia with its low labour costs and large natural resources, wants to present itself as an attractive option for investment capital.

To be part of the global information exchange and to connect the scattered fragments of a vast and disparate country, Indosat and its space-age technology is at the heart of Indonesia's development plans.

How a Secure Land Title Helps Sustainable Agriculture

by Larry Lohmann

THE takeover of common land and forest rights in Thailand accelerated with the beginning of the era of so-called 'development' after the Second World War. US government missions came into the country and began to encourage the elites to integrate themselves more fully into the world economy.

This resulted in a rapid escalation of change. To transport crops out of farming areas for export, roads had to be planned, financed and built.

Roads into the interior allowed local elites to increase land speculation, often clearing forests to obtain government concessions. Equally, it allowed the central government to consolidate and increase its control over hitherto remote regions.

Industrialised countries benefited from an increase in export crops, promoted by the World Bank and the Thai elite, such as cassava, corn, sugarcane, coffee and so on.

These crops are not the traditional crops of Thailand. They are upland crops, that have only been made possible by moving into the upland areas and clearing forests. Such clearance has resulted in serious damage to the uplands, including erosion of soil and degradation of water stocks, affecting the ecology of both the uplands and the lowlands.

These development projects created an immense threat to traditional ways of life. In many villages, new inputs were required — high yielding varieties of seeds, pesticides and fertilizers — in order to grow the new crops. Concurrently, there was a new need for status, consumer goods.

The overall result was debt, migration, loss of land, forest clearance, and the increasing destruction of ecosystems and degradation of neighbouring land.

Control of land is not just a legal matter of title, but of retaining other necessary resources as well. If water is taken away or degraded by someone growing cassava further up a hillside, then it becomes even more difficult to hold onto land traditionally controlled by a family or village. If new roads and business come into a village, the people controlling these will tend to make alliances with village leaders, reducing the latter's accountability to the rest of the villagers, and thus further reducing the powers of the poorest people.

Villagers in Thailand are, on the whole, well aware of the loss of old systems, and the negative aspects of modern development. Their problem is one of control, and villagers have difficulty in fighting these changes.

The extension of control of the market and state control into marginal areas has now reached a new stage, and a new wave of expropriations are taking place. The government sees these areas as being able to absorb some of the people who have been driven off more profitable land.

However, market forces are increasingly impinging on marginal areas as well. New commercial opportunities are emerging, such as the growth

in eucalyptus plantations, which are an important source of raw material to the paper pulp industry. In some areas, salt mining is also important, but has serious side effects by polluting water and thus impeding rice cultivation.

The taking of villagers' land is exacerbated by government concessions. The government forestry department had been

begin to acknowledge the force of these claims, at least in part.

Again, this demonstrates precise connections between control of land and the forms of agriculture practised. The development of organic agriculture in countries such as Thailand can only occur when the land, and the culture which regards agriculture as a

not villagers who have totally rejected the market, but they have put the market into a subordinate place and keep government officials at arms' length.

That non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have some experience with the Tropical Forestry Action Plan being promoted by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

to exercise political influence to change the plan; in particular they held a public meeting of all the parties in the hope of creating some changes. The Finnish consultancy was taken a back by the opposition from NGOs and villagers and promised to revise the plan.

Another example of the intransigence of aid agencies is shown by a hydropower development. In Northeast Thailand, villagers have practised agriculture along river banks for centuries, using silt from the river as fertilizer. This system is now threatened by a proposal to build an enormous dam; 12,000 local people petitioned against the dam and presented their fears to the World Bank which is proposing to part-fund the development. The villagers' case was that if the dam was built they would be forced to move away from their traditional homes to infertile lands, abandoned by previous tenants.

However the World Bank has rejected claims of negative aspects of the project and sees the issue as one of finding the right price to pay off the villagers.

— Third World Network Features

Thai people began to lose common land last century when it was taken over for the production of rice for export. Some Thais do have a secure title to land; Larry Lohmann shows how this helps sustainable agriculture.

given control over about half the country's land area by 1960, leaving all those living on the land without title, despite the fact that they felt as if they should have entitlement under common law.

This has led to an explosive social and political situation, with frequent confrontations between villagers and commercial and state interests. This atmosphere is not conducive to such long-term aims as the development of organic agriculture.

The connection between sustainable agriculture and the control of land is seen in Thailand by the fact that resistance to expropriation of land is often strongest in areas where organic agriculture is practised as part of the culture. This connection is clearly demonstrated by the traditional irrigation systems of northern Thailand, which have been used for many hundreds of years.

The hill forest provides the sources of streams and also provides other goods for the villagers. Water is carefully managed so that it feeds the rice fields both on the hillside and in the valleys. This system does not distinguish between agriculture, forestry and water management; all three are essential to each other.

However, when the 'modern' agricultural system was introduced, the forests were given to logging companies to help contribute towards national income; the streams were given to the power companies and agriculture was devoted to cash crops for export. Obviously this was a threat to the villagers' livelihoods. Taking away the forest means that the streams are also removed from common usage, silted and dried up in the dry season.

Damming the streams for power means that water can no longer be controlled for the agricultural system. The villagers saw clearly that a threat to any part of the system was a direct threat to themselves, their way of life, diet, culture and so on.

Resistance was strong. The logging ban introduced in Thailand in 1989 was in part the result of pressure from villagers whose traditional irrigation practices were threatened. Villagers took part in marches, blocked logging roads, prevented companies from taking logs out of the forest, demonstrated at local district centres, compiled petitions, demanded to see the prime minister and joined forces with villagers from their own and other regions of the country. The Thai government

way of life, are both secured.

Farmers in remote regions of Thailand have worked out appropriate systems of organic agriculture for themselves. These include a combination of mixed farming, intercropping, fish ponds, fruit trees, rice paddies and pigs.

Farmers spend 30 or 40 years of their lives working out how to do this in ways which respect the local environment and maintain their independence and culture. This type of agriculture is only found in areas where villagers are secure in their land tenure. These are

The Finnish bilateral aid agency (FINIDA) has been entrusted with the financing of this plan, and has hired a Finnish consultancy to draw up a strategy to save Thailand's remaining forests. Thai NGOs saw a preliminary draft of the proposal and discovered that the recommendations were for 80-90% industrial forestry, that is, planting eucalyptus for the paper industry.

Villagers assessed the effects of the strategy on their way of life and decided that this path of development was not for them. The NGOs, tried

Despite Sanctions Iraq Builds Huge River Project

by Michael Jansen from Baghdad

COMPLETION of a huge land reclamation project over the past three months has earned Iraq condemnation and threats of military action in the West rather than praise.

The scheme, called the Third River, is hailed by Iraqi officials as "the largest single irrigation project in Mesopotamian history" but denounced by the West as a project designed to destroy the 6,000-year-old way of life of the tribal people who live in Iraq's southern marshlands. The facts dispute Western charges.

The Third River was first proposed 40 years ago, in 1952, by an American consultant. Its object was to reclaim vast stretches of agricultural land that had become barren or unproductive through salination, due to over-irrigation and lack of proper drainage.

The target area was ancient "Mesopotamia," the "Land between the Two Rivers," the Tigris and the Euphrates. From the air this appears as a vast area of black desert, a deadly white scurf of salt spread over the land which was once the granary of Babylonia.

For the land to become productive once again it must be washed with sweet water from the Tigris and Euphrates, in a process known as leaching, for five to ten years, and the saline water carried away. The vehicle for carrying away this water is the Third River. This is a drainage canal, 90 metres wide at the surface, eight metres deep and 36 metres wide at the base.

The canal has been dug from Mahmudiya, 30 kilometres south of Baghdad, to skirt the al-Hammur marshland and discharge into another drainage project, al-Iraqi, at the northern end of the man-

made Basra river, which was built during the Iran-Iraq war to replace the Shatt-al-Arab as a shipping lane. Feeding into the Third River is an elaborate network of drainage pipes and channels.

Iraq has just inaugurated the Third River project, a vast land reclamation scheme in the southern marshlands. The scheme will return land to cultivation and make it accessible for oil exploration. Environmentalists say the project will destroy the lives of Marsh Arabs. The West, reports Gemini News Service, is condemning Iraq for completing a project it once proposed and helped to launch.

Work on the Third River began in 1953 and has been progressing sporadically from sector to sector ever since. The first section in the north was completed in 1954; the second, in the central sector, in 1959, by Dutch contractors. Other sections in this sector were completed by a Soviet contractor in 1986 at the same time as a German firm finished the southern sector.

By 1992, 85 per cent of the work was done. Most of the work was done by foreign firms and they were compelled to withdraw when sanctions were imposed on Iraq in 1990.

In June the Iraqis themselves undertook the completion of the project in all sectors, employing 4,500 labourers and 3,000 machines, worth \$2 billion, seized from Russian, East European, Chinese and Korean firms. The firms have been promised compensation.

The Third River was Iraq's first development priority after it had rebuilt most of the infrastructure wrecked by the aerial onslaught by the Western coalition. During these months, as during the reconstruction drive, the Iraqis worked their men and machines night and day, every day.

Baghdad was spurred by the need to rebuild its agriculture

quickly. Production has fallen from 20 to 10 per cent of GNP since 1960, compelling Iraq to import 70 per cent of its food — a dangerous dependency, as deprivation under the sanctions regime showed.

has cut the flow of the Euphrates into Iraq from 700 to 260 cubic metres per second, and to the use by Iran of the waters of local streams and rivers, notably the Karun, which flow into the marshes.

The first person to propound this theory was Max Van Der Stoep, a Dutch envoy sent by the UN to Iraq early in 1992. He did not go to the marshes because, as he told an interviewer, he "did not have time." He reported that the Third River would drain the marshes and deprive the Marsh Arabs of their natural habitat — an ironic charge from a Dutchman whose country is built on reclaimed land.

Military analysts contend that the real objective of the Third River scheme is the draining of the marshes so that the Iraqi Army can drive out the 10,000 dissidents and an unknown number of refugees who sought sanctuary there after the southern Shia rebellion failed in March 1991. These analysts cite as proof of the accusation the fact that the water level in the marshes has fallen recently.

The Iraqis argue that this is the result of Turkey's massive Ataturk Dam project, which

flow of the saline water to do so, although most of the rebels are in the Hawizah marsh, which is distant from the Third River.

Instead the Iraqi builders have ensured that flooding will



However, if the Iraqi army was indeed determined to drive rebels and refugees quickly and easily out of the inaccessible reaches of the marshes, it would simply flood the marshes, using the heavy

not happen by building a dike along the entire length of the 40-kilometre stretch where the Third River touches the Hammur marsh, the large wetland and lake system west of the Tigris.

Baghdad has already drained and reclaimed certain locations within the marshes. Large and proven oil fields could add 2.5 million barrels a day to Iraq's output. It is estimated that one-third of Iraq's oil reserves are under the marshes. Because of the oil, the inhospitable, malarial marshes where temperatures climb to 60 degrees C in summer, will continue to be invaded by developers building bridges, roads, schools, clinics, electricity plants and houses.

As part of the country's reconstruction plan, the Iraqis have already rebuilt facilities damaged or destroyed during the Gulf war. Baghdad is determined to treat its Marsh Arabs as human beings who have a place in modern Iraq rather than relegate them to a marshland museum as anthropological specimens.

— Gemini News