

Canal Waters Dispute

(Contributed)

WHEN the Prime Minister opened the sluice gates of the Nangal Canal on July 8, he seems to have released not only the life-giving Waters of the turbulent Sutlej to irrigate some of the most arid tracts in the Union but also a flood of invective and abuse on the other side of the border. In the hysterical outpourings of the Pakistan press and in what is by now the familiar hymn of hate preached by Pakistan politicians the issues involved arc getting clouded. Our own publicity whose effectiveness has never been very high has not countered Pakistan's propaganda and the harm it is doing to our international prestige; nor have the pontifical pronouncements of the correspondents of reputedly impartial newspapers in England and America done much to clear the air.

The facts however are not so complicated if one wishes to perceive the truth, and in view of the heat generated on the other side of the frontier, they bear repetition.

Partition gave Pakistan a greater share of water of the Indus system; the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab though taking off in Kashmir flow almost entirely in Pakistan: of the other three tributaries the Ravi enters Pakistan near Lahore while the Sutlej flows for the greater length in India entering Pakistan near Suleimanki; the Beas is a tributary of Sutlej and flows entirely through Indian territory. Of the magnificent canal system built up by such pioneers as Sir Ganga Rain and developed by the sturdy Jat peasantry, both Hindu and Sikh, the greater share also fell to Pakistan; not merely were these fine cultivators who won back the land from the desert and made them the smiling wheat and cotton fields Pakistan has inherited, forced to leave the scene of their endeavour but the type of land they got in India was hardly suited for their rehabilitation unless life-giving water flowed to it. This is the background to the urgency with which the new Government of India undertook the taming of the waters of the Sutlej.

The Bhakra Nangal scheme was not new. As early as 1908 the idea was mooted and even in the days of the Unionist-Muslim League Ministries in the Punjab, serious

attempts were made to start preliminary work on the project. Partition only altered some details but the broad pattern of the project has not undergone any major changes. The scheme envisages the construction of a dam at Bhakra which would have a storage capacity of 7.4 million acre feet of water. About 8½ miles downstream the Nangal dam has been built to head up the river supplies by 53 feet (actually till the completion of the Bhakra dam the Nangal barrage will head up supplies by 36 feet). The Nangal Hydrel Canal takes off from the upstream of the Nangal dam. The Bhakra irrigation system consists of the Bhakra main line canal (a continuation of the Nangal Hydrel channel) and the Bist Doab Canal. The project, grandiose in conception, is fast taking shape and it is a matter of special pride that our engineers completed the first part of it ahead of schedule.

Old and New in Punjab (1) Canal System

Western Jamna Canal (Old)—

Derives from Jamna and forms a part of the Jamna Canal system—Irrigates parts of Karnal, Jind, Hissar and Rohtak.

Sirhand Canal (old)—Derives from Sutlej at Rupar—Irrigates Nabha, Patiala, Sirhind, and Abhor and other parts of Ferozepur District.

Upper Bari Doab Canal (Old)—Taken from Ravi on the Indian side—Irrigates parts of Amritsar, Kapurthala and Lahore.

Bhakra Nangal Main Canal (New)—Taken from Sutlej at Bhakra—will irrigate Ambala, Patiala, parts of Hissar, Karnal and Northern Rajasthan.

Bist Doab Canal (New)—Branch of Bhakra Nangal Canal, starts near Nowanshahr—will irrigate Jullundur and parts of Hoshiarpur.

Bikaner Canal (New)—Derives from Sutlej at Ferozepur—Irrigates dry districts of Bikaner State.

While India was thus celebrating a major national achievement, the cry raised in Pakistan was based on the largely mistaken fear that the diversion of the Sutlej waters through the Nangal channel would deprive Pakistan of her share of the Sutlej waters. The Sutlej canals in Pakistan take off from the Ferozepur headworks which lie in India. It was obvious that headworks situated in India could not be feeding the Pakistan canals for ever and in the agreement of May 1948, which India had filed as a treaty with the UNO and which Pakistan now complains was signed under duress, it was laid down that supplies to Pakistan would be made at a progressively diminishing rate, while Pakistan was to tap alternative sources of water to feed her canals. Lillienthal a former Director of TV A presented Pakistan with a ready-made case and the matter was thereafter referred to the World Bank whose proposals (though by no means favourable to India) were accepted by this country. These proposals, authentic details of which are not available, appear to have allocated to India the use of the waters of the Ravi, Beas and Sutlej while Pakistan would have exclusive rights on the waters of the other three rivers. The Bank's Plan appears also to have required India to pay Pakistan somewhere about Rs 60 crores to enable her to tap alternative sources. The alternative sources would appear to be the construction of link canals, whereby the canals fed now wholly by the Sutlej would be fed from rivers or canals in Pakistan. One such link between Balloki on the Ravi and Sulemanki on the Sutlej has recently been completed while the Bambanwala-Bedian link connects the Sutlej with the Chenab. A third link from Marala on the Chenab to the Ravi is also proposed to be taken up. While the Bank plan has thus been accepted by India despite its limitations, Pakistan's reply (initially interpreted by the Bank as a rejection) has been that it neither accepted nor rejected it. Since then, however, her Prime Minister has announced that she has accepted it conditionally. It is clear that Pakistan is playing for time in the hope that while negotiations continue there would be

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as suggested by Mr Black, no reduction in the, supplies of water.

Against this background, the issues to be examined would be firstly whether Pakistan has in fact suffered a diminution in supplies as a result of the opening of the Nangal Canal and secondly if she has, whether the reduction is of such an amount as cannot be replaced by canal links of the Balloki-Sulemanki type. On the first issue, the figures furnished by Indian authorities do not indicate that there has been any reduction in supplies. The supplies being made to Pakistan now are governed by the 1948 Agreement and this continues; there may have been variations from day to day but this is bound to be so where the canal's supplies depend on the run of the river and not on storage. Such fluctuations are not peculiar to this year; they have occurred before, even in pre-partition days. The importance India attaches to this supply of water to Pakistan is to be seen in the appointment of a special Commissioner in charge of Canals whose job it is to see that Pakistan gets her supplies.

Daily readings of the water supplied are also made available to Pakistan. Of course it is easy, as Pakistan has done, to deny or, as some British correspondents have, to doubt the accuracy of the readings. but on the ground of disbelief for Pakistan politicians and British journalists to demand the right to take the readings would be an intolerable encroachment on our national sovereignty. The Government of India has, in spite of this, accepted the principle of joint readings of the discharges of water in the Dipalpur and Central Bari Doab canals and in the Sutlej below Ferozepur. No reply is reported to have been sent by Pakistan to detailed Indian proposals to this effect.

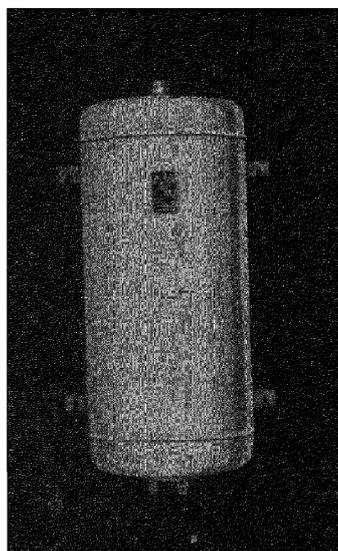
There is a further point. Pakistan maintains that there was a reduction in the canal's supplies with effect from July 8. While this may have sufficed to whip up the necessary hysteria by announcing with melo-dramatic effect the blow which this country smote by raising the sluice gates at Nangal, the leaders of the Pakistani hate campaign seemed to have missed a simple point. A reduction, if there was any, in the supplies would not have been felt till July 11, for the opening of the Nangal canal could make its effect felt only after this lapse of time.

Land descriptions have however appeared in the Pakistani press of the desolation in the areas fed by the canals and the Pakistan correspondent of a well-known London newspaper referred to 'the devastation in Pakistan cotton fields'. It has since been pointed out in India that the diversion of the Sutlej waters had little to do with this, even if true. It has been said that it is possible that this British journalist saw areas, which were lying fallow as in that area it is not uncommon for lands to be sown every other year. Apart from Pakistan, press reports claiming in a different context a better cotton crop this year, this correspondent does not seem to be aware that cotton is normally sown in May and that the effects, if any, of the Bhakra Canal opening would be apparent only in the second week of July which in any case is the time around which the monsoon breaks.

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Regarding Pakistan's ability to replace the supplies through link canals, the Balloki-Sulemanki is reputed to have a capacity of 15,000 cusecs from April 1955 while the other links would also help to feed the canals which are now drawing water from the Sutlej. If Pakistan's intentions are to replace the waters of the Sutlej and not to use these links to irrigate new areas, these should be enough.

Thus Pakistan has little to fear from India. But for Pakistan to suggest that some of the poorest parts of this country should go without water because she should continue to have the luxury of water supplies without paying for it, is hardly fair, India is conscious of her responsibilities as an upper riparian State, but duty to her own people demands that she should go ahead with her schemes with Pakistan's co-operation if possible and despite her opposition, if necessary.



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