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EGYPT

AGRICULTURE OFFICIAL INTERVIEWED ON LAND RECLAMATION PROJECTS

Cairo AL-AKHBAR in Arabic 29 Dec 83 p 5

/Interview with Dr Husni Hafiz, head of agriculture, irrigation, and food security sector, by Jamil Jurj: "We Have Reclaimed 23,000 Feddans; The Goal is to Reclaim 150,000;" date and place not specified

/Text In accordance with the law establishing the National investment Bank, Dr Kamal al-Januri, the minister of planning, has asked Dr Sa'id al-Hanafi, the vice president of the bank, and Dr Husni Hafiz, the head of the agriculture, irrigation, and food security sector, not to be satisfied with a written follow-up when confirming that the investment funds have been used. Rather, he says a field investigation should also be conducted to make sure that the money has been spent for the goals set down in the plan. Secondly, such an investigation should be done in order to remove any obstacles that may block the projects and to provide the funds needed by them, if the situation requires that.

For the past few days, Dr Husni Hafiz has been engaged in preparing the final version of the situation. Therefore, we conducted this important interview with him.

27 Million...For Emergencies

/Question To start with, I want to clarify the High Dam situation first. Was it not decided during the visit to Aswan by Dr Mustafa Kamal Hilmi, the deputy prime minister, to carry out an emergency plan?

/Answer Although the image of the current situation is reassuring, many matters must be decided.

First: 27 million pounds have been allocated to implement the emergency plan for a period of 3 years, now that it has become clear that the probable life of much equipment has ended. Moreover, we have no device for clearing away sand under water. The Soviet /word illegible prepared it during the construction of the dam, but it is not currently available.

Second: The project is suffering from a lack of engineers. It has reached 70 percent due to the absence of incentives and suitable housing accommodations.

Third: Cracks have appeared in the surface of the earth in the areas to the west and east of Kalabishah Bay, no more than 40 kilometers to the south of the High Dam. This has caused fissures to appear in the ground to the west of the bay. This has been helped by the proximity of the earthquake center, which lies 60 kilometers to the south. It will probably get closer than that. This has been shown by the maps and photographs done by the field survey.

#### Earthquake Observation Stations

Fourth: Inspecting has shown that a number of precautions have been taken. Primary among them is the provision of observation and measuring devices. Dr Kamal al-Janzuri, the minister of planning, has allocated 9 million pounds for this purpose. Moreover, a temporary earthquake observation center has been set up and equipped at Aswan. Moreover, earthquake observation stations have been set up around the High Dam and the lake in various spots in the Western Desert, along the northern portion of the High Dam reservoir, and on the body of the dam. The High Dam Board has completed the blueprints and designs for a building to house the center for earthquake research, and the contract has been put up for bidding.

#### The Rock That Threatens the High Dam

Fifth: We are now importing automatic observation stations to monitor the water level. However, the problem we are currently facing is the presence of a huge boulder next to the right side of the rear channel. It is leaning at an angle of 70 to 80 degrees. Naturally, it is surrounded by fissures and small rocks. This threatens us with the possibility of the boulder falling in. If it happens, there will be a problem, due to the presence of the electricity generating and distributing stations. In order to deal with the situation, we put the project of solving the problem posed by this boulder up for international bidding. A company from the public sector and a specialized Yugoslavian company won the task of dealing with this boulder. The job will cost 16.5 million pounds. A period of 40 months has been set aside for this project, which will be carried out by changing the angle at which the rock tilts to 45 degrees.

Sixth: In a report submitted to the officials, I suggested that the chairman of the High Dam Board be granted ministerial powers and all the scientific facilities and personnel he needs, so that he can confront any emergency without referring back to Cairo.

Question Let us move on now to agriculture and food security programs. The 1982-83 plan contained investments worth 426.2 million pounds. What were the results of the follow-up investigation?

Answer The agencies requested additional allocations amounting to 17.8 million pounds. However, the sum actually used did not exceed 343.8 million pounds.

Question Therefore, why were requests for additional investments made, as long as the original allocations were not completely used? (The head of the agriculture sector did not respond to the question.)

#### Results of Field Survey

Question What about the results of the field survey on the project level? This is what President Husni Mubarak was eager to learn about during his visits to the various sites.

Answer A lot of things were brought out. Here are the most important points:

The sum of 9 million pounds was allocated for the Land Improvement Agency. However, the program was not completely executed, since the al-Ballah quarry was exhausted. It was the sole source of agricultural gypsum. The problem was compounded by the failure to complete the surfacing of the road leading to the alternate quarry.

The sum of 3.3 million pounds was allocated for the deep sea fishing project, in order to build a boat and a refrigeration unit. However, the project did not see the light of day, because the economic benefit study was not completed.

The al-Nubariyah Company for Seed Production directed some investment into residential and non-residential buildings and furniture, as well as means of transportation and equipment.

The plan included 5 million pounds for agricultural research. However, it became clear that some of the results of this research were separate from the production sites.

The quality of 50 percent of the land deteriorated, so that it became third or fourth class land, as a result of erosion. In order to treat this problem, the sum of 9 million pounds was allocated to improving the land's fertility. It has become clear that only half of the sum allocated was used!

#### Output of the Meat Company is 1 Percent

Question It has been noted that the prices charged by butchers for red meat have been rising steadily, without any controls. What has the plan done to confront this situation?

Answer I agree with the announcement made previously by Dr Kamal al-Januri. He said that the provision of meat is beyond the capacity of many states, especially those that have no pastures. In Egypt, we allocate 30 percent of the harvest to growing green fodder for non-productive animals, such as bulls and donkeys. Therefore, the state

has focused its interest on producing non-traditional kinds of fodder, so the land can be used for other crops. More than 9 million pounds have been made available for the Meat Production Company and the completion of the West al-Nubariyah project. So far, more than 30 million pounds have been spent on it.

Question What about poultry?

Answer The Poultry Company received the largest share of investments. It amounted to 25 percent. Thus, its capital is more than 120 million pounds. There is no doubt that the company has begun to make progress by giving up its fattening policy.

#### Future of the Agricultural Companies

Question Most agricultural companies continued to belong to the Ministry of Land Reclamation until the middle of 1982-83. This led to a lack of clarity concerning their goals and the exploitation of their capabilities. Therefore, ownership of them was transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture. What have the results been like?

Answer Dr Yusuf Wali, minister of agriculture, has begun drawing up appropriate policies for each individual company. Some companies assist the Ministry of Supply in its efforts to meet the needs of consumers for goods for which demand is increasing. One thinks of grapes in northern al-Tahrir. There are also companies for improved seeds, intensive mechanization, and experimental agricultural policies.

The Vineyards Company is facing the problem of vineyards in which production is declining due to the rising level of subterranean water and poor drainage. Hope exists for treating this problem.

The West al-Nubariyah Company is suffering from the problem of the increasing salinity of its irrigation water. This has had a very large effect on its productivity.

The al-Nubariyah Seed Production Company is supposed to produce improved seeds. However, it contains 24,000 feddans and the productivity of the land is low. Thus, it cannot achieve its goal.

The Maryut Agricultural Company does not have enough irrigation water.

The Northern al-Tahrir Company has begun to alleviate the problem of a lack of irrigation water with the establishment motors for irrigation. However, it is suffering from a drainage problem. They expect to deal with it by executing the West al-Nubariyah drainage canal project.

The Southern al-Tahrir Company is supposed to produce citrus fruit. However, productivity per feddan has fallen to 2 tons, as compared with 8 tons of other land, although the land has no irrigation or drainage problems. Moreover, the company has turned new areas over to the cooperatives for exploitation.

32,000 Feddans

Question The economic conference chaired by President Husni Mubarak said it was necessary to reclaim at least 150,000 feddans a year. What has the plan achieved?

Answer Unfortunately, last year all the companies reclaimed a total of 17,282 feddans, while the Arab Contractors Company, of the "public sector," reclaimed 15,000 feddans. Thus, the total amount of land reclaimed was 32,282 feddans.

Field survey operations have uncovered the following obstacles and problems:

Private capital has refrained from taking an effective part in land reclamation projects, in view of the fact that such projects need large investments, while the turnover of capital is slow.

There is no connection or coordination between the progress of reclamation activities and the construction of major infrastructure projects. Such coordination would allow the achievement of complete independence for the areas being reclaimed.

No definite policy has been drawn up for managing the reclaimed lands, and no method for exploiting them has been worked out. Partly as a result of this, individuals, some of whom have no relation to agriculture, have bought the land.

Not enough irrigation water is available for the reclaimed lands, especially during flooding and cleaning operations; then there are the drainage problems.

Relationship of the Owner and the Tenant

Question At the conclusion of his interview with AL-AKHBAR, Dr Husni Hafiz 'Abd-al-Rahman offered a number of important recommendations for filling the food gap. The most important one was to change the composition of the harvest so that it would be consistent with the country's needs for food and the circumstances of the land. This method has succeeded in determining areas for cotton and rice on the national level.

Answer There must be a reexamination of the livestock policy, especially since the agricultural area set aside for livestock and poultry fodder represents about 30 percent of the harvested area.

We must work to introduce new crops. The economics of the production of our present crops and their cost must be studied, keeping in mind the period for which they are on the land and their consumption of water and the requirements of production.

It is necessary to reexamine the laws on agricultural reform and the regulation of the relationship between owners and agricultural tenants, so that the owners of less than 3 feddans can recover their land from the tenants and either farm it themselves or supervise it. Many tenants have taken to stripping the land of its topsoil for the sake of quick profits for the owners of brick furnaces. Thus, they have destroyed the land's productivity and fertility. As for areas larger than 3 feddans, they ought to be farmed cooperatively, because the owner of the land always feels it is a part of himself.

We must take an interest in our salt water fish resources. The fishing beds must be exploited scientifically. Fish production should be industrialized, and fish waste should be used as cattle fodder.

We ought to reexamine the law on the investment of Arab and foreign capital, so it can be directed toward land reclamation projects in a manner consistent with the projects in the development plan.

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